

Sight & Sound

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LYNNE RAMSAY'S
'WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN'

THE DARDENNE BROTHERS'
'THE KID WITH A BIKE'

MEXICAN GANG THRILLER
'MISS BALA'

'THE BLACK POWER
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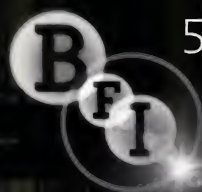
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Welcome. It's autumn and festival season is here. As we preview the BFI London Film Festival and report from the recent Venice and Toronto, *Sight & Sound* is in a position to offer an overview of the best work coming your way during the next 12 months. The encouraging news is that British films are in the ascendant. It's a sign of growing confidence that our films and filmmakers are reaching out to international subjects, including Steve McQueen with his Venice hit *Shame* (far left, and p.42) and Lynne Ramsay with her uncompromising adaptation of the bestseller *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (left, and p.16). But that doesn't mean British filmmakers are neglecting the domestic scene: actor Paddy Considine also makes his feature-directing debut with the gritty Leeds-set character drama *Tyrannosaur* (p.40). Just don't call it social realism, or he'll set his leading man Peter Mullan on you. ➔ **Nick James**

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AND ONLINE THIS MONTH LFF preview, interviews, reviews and a staff blog | Nicholas Ray's *We Can't Go Home Again* | The Black Power Mixtape and more www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

The London Korean Film Festival 2011

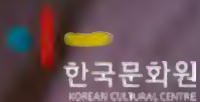
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NICK JAMES

THE THICK RED PILE



At the Donostia-San Sebastian Film Festival, where I am writing this, they have a fine tradition. Whenever the screening of a competition film ends, a portion of the audience dashes for the doors. It's not (or not

usually) that they can't wait to get away – it's that they want to be in the best position on the interior walkways from which to see and applaud the film's makers as they head for the exit of the festival's enormous cinema complex. I'm told that there's nothing more delightful for directors, actors, producers and others who have sweated over a film than to experience this double round of appreciation as they head for their cars.

I mention this scenario because the theme of this issue (as with every November cover date) is festivals. Previews of the BFI London Film Festival and our round-up reports from Venice and Toronto make this an annual ritual for us. But purists who prefer festivals to simply celebrate cinema as an artform often complain that such public appreciation of the 'talent', as I describe above, can be an undesirable distraction from the films themselves. More specifically, they question the perceived need for festivals to have sufficient glamour on the red carpet to get the kind of media exposure that their sponsors and other stakeholders crave. But before we get to that celebrity-culture quandary, let me digress on the subject of the current status of film festivals

As we celebrate one of the juiciest LFF line-ups in memory, it's worth noting that there are changes in the wind. Some are UK-specific changes, such as this being the last LFF put together by my excellent colleague Sandra Hebron. Next year we'll have the first Edinburgh programmed by new appointee Chris Fujiwara, as well as the first LFF from Sandra's replacement Clare Stewart, who did such a successful job of running the Sydney Film Festival.

These new creative directors are coming in to positions of arguably much greater responsibility and influence than ever before. This is because the importance of these events for all types of special-interest film has become paramount. And in this way festivals have become a more sensitive bellwether for the state of film in general. What gets talked about at festivals is the most important

indicator of future success for almost every film that isn't marketed to be a mainstream hit.

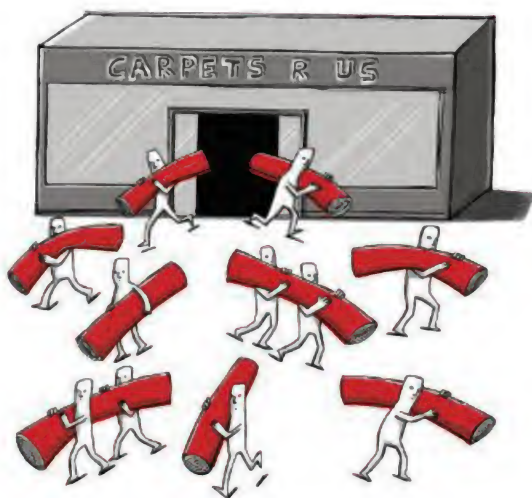
Since the millennium, festivals have increased in number, and often in length too, but the involvement of complex alliances of stakeholders and sponsors has forced several to expand their ambitions, even though the amount of available films worth seeing each year does not seem to grow very much – despite the cheapness of digital filmmaking. Until recently I had assumed that this pressure would lead, once the consequences of the global credit disaster had worked through to festivals (many of which rely on government or municipal subsidy), to some collapsing. That's still possible, but I'm more persuaded now that festivals are too essential to the future of film to be allowed to vanish.

At a time when download is looking to replace the DVD as the preferred platform once a film's cinema run has come to an end, the value of individual films as discrete artworks and/or

Purists question the perceived need for festivals to have sufficient glamour on the red carpet to get the media exposure that their sponsors crave

entertainments is diminishing in the marketplace. In this context, film festivals are now the exact equivalent of music festivals – the main driver for every aspect of communal recognition for specialist, prestige or arthouse works.

This is one reason why the cinema 'talent' factor is more important than ever. The conundrum is that everyone wants to be in touch with some sort of fellow feeling or community at a festival, but at the same time it must also somehow feel like an exclusive event. So none of the larger film festivals can afford to downgrade the red carpet. It is, of course, a problem that the US studios that generally supply such talent are not much enamoured of expensive film festivals. What keeps the whole festival idea together is that the people who actually make films are mostly cinephiles themselves – and that includes the actors, who bear the burden of the hunger for glamour. All the best festivals have their own individual traits that make them special, but in almost every case now you can't have your Béla Tarrs without your George Clooneys.



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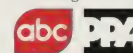
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Tattoo you

With its cold landscapes a perfect setting for murky tales of murder, 'Scandinavian noir' has been the inescapable genre of recent years, through such TV series as 'The Killing' and the various adaptations of Henning Mankell's Wallander books. But the most successful of all such Nordic crime thrillers have of course been Stieg Larsson's

'Millennium' novels, read by commuters the world over, and already the basis for three hit Swedish films. All of which made the news that David Fincher was adapting Larsson's 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo' something of a surprise – what would he bring to what was arguably an already overexposed story? But early word is strong,

and trailers for Fincher's film, which stars Rooney Mara (above) from 'The Social Network' as Lisbeth Salander and Daniel Craig as Mikael Blomkvist, look moodily atmospheric and dynamic, Fincher's trademark sheen bolstered by a Trent Reznor score. The film opens in the UK on 26 December.

Back in the Zone



Then and now: the building that houses the "Room" in Tarkovsky's *Stalker* and, right, the actual location today

Mark Le Fanu visits Tallinn for a festival dedicated to the genius of Tarkovsky's *'Stalker'*

It has been Tallinn's turn, this year, to be designated European Capital of Culture. Various events were laid on to celebrate the occasion, including a festival built around Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*, which was shot here – in difficult and even mysterious circumstances – in 1978, when Estonia was part of the Soviet empire.

The event was staged at an imposing cinema, the Soprus, dating from Soviet times but now a flourishing arthouse venue run by an ex-student of mine, Tiina Savi. Among invited guests were Tarkovsky's brilliant composer Eduard Artemiev, who provided the electronic scores for *Solaris*, *Mirror* and *Stalker*. Alas the great man was otherwise engaged; but his son Artemiy, also a musician of stature, was at hand, a fount of knowledge and enthusiasm. Naturally the film itself was shown, on an excellent 35mm print, along with a number of documentaries (some of them well enough known, others rare and interesting) that provided the event with a rich surrounding context.

For the genuine *Stalker* aficionado, however, the real lure of the occasion was the chance to see with one's own eyes the locations where the film was shot. The landscape of the movie, after all, is one of the strangest and most haunted in modern cinema, conflated as it often is in the mind's eye with the post-nuclear landscape of Chernobyl, the destruction of which in 1986 – seven years after *Stalker*'s release – the movie seems weirdly to anticipate.

Our guided tour started where the film starts, in a deserted old rail-making factory at the edge of the city. It's here, under a vast brick chimney disappearing into the mist, that *Stalker* and his companions make their initial breakout, driving an

open-topped Land Rover that they later abandon in favour of one of those curious motorised rail-carts that transports them, hypnotically, into the wondrous landscape of the "Zone". The rails have been taken up, but everything else was gratifyingly recognisable, with no modern additions to spoil the atmosphere – not even a placard to commemorate the connection with one of the 20th century's most iconic films.

Later we visited other spots outside the city: the meadow dotted with abandoned tanks that the pilgrims come across early in their journey (unsurprisingly, the tanks have gone); the waterfall that hoves into view beside the ruined power station; and, most evocative of all, a building in isolated scrubland that we immediately recognised as the location housing the famous "Room", where, so it is surmised, the travellers' deepest wishes will be answered.

All in all, a marvellous tour, made perfect by an unexpected epiphany: crossing the stream as we approached the power station, a black Alsatian emerged from the undergrowth. No, this emblematically Tarkovskian animal had not been provided by the Tallinn Tourist Board. He (or she) turned out to belong to the janitor, who had never seen the film.

It is no secret that *Stalker* was a difficult film to get into the can, with nearly all the exterior footage having to be reshot after problems in the lab. Just how difficult is the subject of Igor Maiboroda's 2009 documentary *Rerberg and Tarkovsky: The Reverse Side of Stalker*, which was shown at the festival. The film investigates the events surrounding the sacking of Tarkovsky's distinguished cinematographer Georgy Rerberg and

his replacement first by a cameraman named Kalashnikov (who shot a further 1500 metres of film), and then by DP Aleksandr Knyazhinsky (who's credited on the film).

Apparently there had been huge tensions between Tarkovsky and Rerberg throughout the preparations for the project; the harmony that reigned on the set of their previous collaboration, *Mirror*, evidently gave way, early on, to catastrophic quarrels. Though Maiboroda's film is absolutely on Rerberg's side (its frank partisanship being one of the things that makes it so interesting), it seems clear to me that Rerberg, as an experienced professional, could scarcely avoid taking responsibility for the calamitous lab work that ruined the initial negative and came within an ace of scuppering the project. One very brief sequence shot by Tarkovsky's ex-colleague does survive in the finished artefact – the scene where a whirlwind whips itself up over the heaving marsh terrain.

To watch the film now is to marvel at three related aspects of the adventure: first, Tarkovsky's courage and obstinacy in confronting catastrophe head on, and picking up the pieces. Second, the fact that he was allowed to proceed – a tribute of sorts to the astonishing flexibility of the Soviet filmmaking system in its autumn years. Finally, there is the courage of the principal actors in agreeing to be put through the mill in this way. (They are all dead now, alas.)

After all, *Stalker* is one of the most intensely physical films ever made; not a single scene makes allowance for the comfort of the performers. Yet the work of art Tarkovsky ultimately created transcends the travails of its making.

● **Lenny Abrahamson**, the much-heralded Irish director of *'Adam and Paul'* and *'Garage'*, is currently shooting *'What Richard Did'*, a story set in present-day Dublin that follows a group of privileged teens over the course of a summer, focusing on Richard, a sports star who commits a random act of violence. Malcolm Campbell wrote the screenplay, and the cast includes Sam Keeley, Roisin Murphy and Lars Mikkelsen.

● **Abderrahmane Sissako**, the Mauritania-born director of *'Waiting for Happiness'* and *'Bamako'*, is in production on *'Mettou'*, a story about a young Haratin woman who was taken as a concubine by an older man at the age of 14, and returns to her hometown after his death to find the man she really loved.

● **Joe Wright**, recognising which side his bread is buttered, is set to return to the prestigious, epic period romances that made his name (*'Pride & Prejudice'*, *'Atonement'*) with an adaptation of Tolstoy's *'Anna Karenina'*. Tom Stoppard has written the script, and the starry Brit cast includes Keira Knightley, Jude Law and Aaron Johnson.

● **Shane Meadows** is at work on three one-hour films that continue the story of his *'This Is England '86'* series. *'This Is England '88'* picks up the story over Christmas in 1988 as Lol (Vicky McClure) struggles to cope with life as a single mother. A further film, set in 1990, is also rumoured. Meadows had been linked to a film about Tom Simpson, the Nottingham-born cyclist who collapsed of exhaustion and died while cycling the Tour de France in 1967.

● **Steven Spielberg**, below, is finally readying the shoot of his long-anticipated biopic of Abraham Lincoln. The film was set to star Liam Neeson, but Neeson has since been replaced by Daniel Day-Lewis. The script, by Tony Kushner, writer of *'Angels in America'*, is reportedly based on Doris Kearns Goodwin's book *'Team of Rivals'*, and focuses on the last days of the American Civil War. Spielberg is planning a release at the end of next year, to avoid charges of the film being used as political capital in next

autumn's US presidential elections.



For the genuine 'Stalker' aficionado, the real lure of the festival was the chance to see the locations where the film was shot

George Kuchar 1942 – 2011

Benjamin Cook pays tribute to the influential underground New York filmmaker

It is no exaggeration to say that George Kuchar, who died on 6 September at the age of 69, was a giant of underground cinema. He produced more than 200 films and kick-started – along with fellow New York luminary Jack Smith – the camp and DIY aesthetics whose influence can still be seen across YouTube. Along the way he inspired the likes of David Lynch, Gus Van Sant and John Waters, who said the films of George (and his twin brother Mike) “gave me the confidence to believe in my own tawdry vision”.

George’s cinematic vision was cast in the crucible of the Bronx cinemas of his childhood, where he absorbed the tropes of his beloved 1950s melodramas. After receiving an 8mm camera for their 12th birthdays, the Kuchar brothers quickly demonstrated a precocious talent that got them noticed by the burgeoning underground cinema movement of the 1960s. Their work was championed by the likes of Jonas Mekas in *The Village Voice*, despite running counter to the more serious-minded avant-garde film concerns of the time with their



DIY ethic: George Kuchar

over-the-top Hollywood homages, which combined a heady mix of overwrought, garish melodrama, scatological humour and knowing pathos. Many of these early Kuchar brothers films are now considered classics, and include attention-grabbing titles such as *Pussy on a Hot Tin Roof* (1961), *Lust for Ecstasy* (1963) and *Hold Me While I’m Naked* (1966), which was named 52nd best film of the 20th century in *The Village Voice* critics’ poll in 2000.

George supported his early filmmaking career working as a commercial artist in, as he called it, “the midtown Manhattan world of

angst and ulcers”. In 1971 he secured a permanent position in the film department at the San Francisco Art Institute, where he was to teach for four decades before illness forced him to stop working earlier this year.

In the late 1960s George and Mike took separate creative directions, with George’s films shifting towards more personal subjects – albeit with signature melodramatic flourishes, such as in *The Mongroloid* (1978), a surprisingly affecting portrait of his dog Bock. Then in the early 1980s George embraced consumer-grade video with gusto and greatly increased his creative output, producing numerous personal diary films that documented, in close-up, the minutiae of his everyday life. Suffused with humour and melancholy, these low-tech productions – edited in camera – were always accompanied by wry commentary delivered in George’s distinctive Bronx drawl. Despite the banality of the non-events they record, the intimacy of George’s diaries find poetry in the most unexpected places. Perhaps the most acclaimed of these are the *Weather Diary* films, documenting George’s annual visits to El Reno to seek out the place where the “whirlwinds huffed and puffed”. This was not so much storm chasing as storm

watching, often out of the window of a motel room; the most perfect example is *Wild Night in El Reno* (1977). It was also on one of these trips that George penned Curt McDowell’s infamous horror-porn film *Thundercrack!* (1975), in which he also starred as a zookeeper alongside the gorilla love interest.

The other major part of George’s output in San Francisco was the yearly feature production he orchestrated with his students. Harking back to his early filmmaking days, these were lurid, high-camp genre pieces ruled over by George’s exuberant spirit and boundless inventiveness in the face of the inevitably limited resources.

George never had aspirations to join the mainstream and work with bigger budgets, and in fact he was more likely to boast about the cheapness of his latest production. But his influence can be felt far beyond the underground, not least for the way in which he demonstrated how much can be said with so little – while always staying true to his dictum that “the head, heart and hairy area below the stomach is what should be stimulated at the cinema”.

■ There will be a tribute screening of George Kuchar films at Tate Modern, London, on 30 October

THE NUMBERS

Pennies from Heaven

Rereleased classics such as Terrence Malick’s ‘Days of Heaven’ can turn a tidy profit, says **Charles Gant**

Anyone who pays attention to box-office figures for independent cinema in the UK will know that for every crossover hit, there are many films that achieve astonishingly small theatrical grosses and dismal screen averages. But a reliable highlight most weeks is the rereleased classic, invariably achieving a healthy average in limited play, anchored by a hefty number at London’s BFI South Bank. Case in point: Terrence Malick’s *Days of Heaven* recently opened with box office bigger than the combined debut grosses achieved by *The Hedgehog*, *Attenberg*, *Self Made* and *Weekender* (all released that same early September weekend).

For the British Film Institute

(publisher of *Sight & Sound*), the motivation for choosing *Days of Heaven*, says theatrical distribution boss Margaret Deriaz, was giving audiences who had just discovered Malick through *The Tree of Life* an opportunity to see an “earlier masterpiece”. It was also helpful that a new digital transfer, supervised by Malick for US DVD label Criterion, was available.

Deriaz explains that her choices are limited by the availability of rights and materials, also balancing “our belief in keeping acknowledged classics alive on the big screen” with “enabling people to discover films that critics and audiences haven’t given enough attention to, and cast a spotlight on them”. In the latter category, the success of the newly restored polar-exploration documentary *The Great White Silence* (see chart) was a “pleasant surprise”, but it’s nevertheless the “must-see

classics” with “cinematic spectacle” that do best.

Digital prints have changed the distribution model. Deriaz may mourn the passing of the days when 35mm prints of rereleases might travel the country, picking up seven- or 14-day bookings, but the digital model has enabled wide, quick-burst rollouts of *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* for Valentine’s Day (a nice little earner in both 2010 and 2011), and even richer opportunities at Christmas. Classic film specialist Park Circus has seen its biggest ever hit with successive festive reissues of *It’s a Wonderful Life* (£660,000 so far); runner-up for the company is *White Christmas*.

While theatrical is usually seen as a loss leader for distributors who then hope to recoup through DVD and download, the rerelease market is different. “Make no mistake, when all rights are available, we acquire them,” says Deriaz. “But with established

BFI rereleases, 2008-11 at the UK box office

Film	Year	Gross
The Conformist	2008	£135,000
Jules et Jim	2008	£126,000
The Leopard	2010	£118,000
The 400 Blows	2009	£89,000
The Big Sleep	2010	£86,000
Breakfast at Tiffany’s (50th anniversary + Valentine’s Day)	2011	£82,000
Breakfast at Tiffany’s (Valentine’s Day)	2010	£76,000
Citizen Kane	2009	£63,000
North by Northwest	2009	£59,000
The Great White Silence	2011	£58,000

classics, they tend not to be. We will do that economically pretty mad thing of acquiring theatrical rights only, because of our commitment to the cinematic experience. And we will push the boat out for something that we believe in – that audiences should see – even if we know it’s not going to be our top earner.”

A quantum of solace

'The Mist in the Palm Trees' creates a haunting found-footage montage of 20th-century history, says **Michael Atkinson**

Think of celluloid, or its modern bitcelled equivalent, as time, time lost but captured, present to us only as a dead poet is present through his lines. We can experience it vicariously, this chunk of time, in perpetuity. But it is still lost – we are watching dead people, dead moments, dead lifestyles, cities that have since died and been replaced by their reinvented selves. Film, all of it, is an approximation of the time travel we cannot actually perform. Everything that is filmed is gone forever.

Which makes found-footage films double-bladed arsenals of grief – the reuse and thus recontextualisation of old film simply magnifies its remove and cuts it adrift – and which makes the rarely seen Spanish film *The Mist in the Palm Trees* (*La niebla en las palmeras*, 2006) an unforgettable song of longing. Lost after a flurry of festival showings a few years back and a limited release in Spain, this rueful, plaintive assemblage, co-directed by Carlos Molinero and Lola Salvador, uses reams of stock footage and celluloid detritus to present a discarded home movie of the early 20th century.

It's also an alternate history, a fragmented biography of a Spanish physicist and photographer named Santiago Bergson (born 1905), pieced together as if from what remains of his haywire memory waves (his hushed narration is spoken by a woman, even more mysteriously), which can only recall "the photos" with certainty. Several of these are repeated so often we question what they mean: four suited men standing by a car, a nude woman with apprehensive eyes. Other images are beautiful in their agedness, as well as disturbing: child funeral portraits, coated men dancing strangely on lawns, bloodied bodies haphazardly captured after any number of atrocities. Mostly, we receive a cataract of old, oddly resonant film clips, antiquated home movies scrambled with rough news footage from the Spanish Civil War and World War II, corpses and battles, men in hats and mushroom clouds.

The montage is indeed fragmentary, repeatedly short-circuiting, seething with shadows and out-of-control emulsion entropy. Is it a fake doc, or a simulacrum of consciousness? The thrust of the



Suspended in time: the apprehensive nude, a recurring 'The Mist in the Palm Trees'

vaporous story revolves around Bergson's role in the civil war, the efforts of both the Allies and the Nazis to shanghai him into working on their respective bomb projects ("Heisenberg needs you!" declaims a four-language title card), his eventual role in the Manhattan Project, and his disappearance soon thereafter. Did he die, and when? The filmmakers muddy their pool even further with new film ostensibly shot in 1982 of three ageing women (in Spain, Cuba and Normandy), each claiming to be Bergson's surviving daughter and mourning their father's memory at three different graves.

Bergson is a fiction, of course, and *The Mist's* drift towards documentary tropes are more dreamlike than concrete. The filmmakers call it the first "quantum" film, and it's certainly a new kind of feature – as tentacled and historical as Craig Baldwin's

For cinephiles, all found-footage films come loaded with elegiac pathos

found-footage films, but swapping his sardonic impishness for a grave, melancholy search through decaying cultural remnants. It means business, emotionally and philosophically. But for a certain type of cinephile, all found-footage films come loaded with elegiac pathos by their very nature; it's a function of film itself.

Like Bruce Conner, and Oleg Kovalov in his debut *Garden of Scorpions* (1992), Molinero and Salvador temper instant wistfulness with instant irony, cutting from a jerkily freeze-framed home-movie

portrait of a three-year-old girl to a masterfully edited sequence in which Bergson (mostly offscreen, but also represented by a bespectacled nerd-hero in an unnamed silent thriller) is chased by the Nazis while boarding a train with a resistance fighter to escape Europe. Comprised mostly of travelogue footage and wartime newsreel stuffing, it's the unlikeliest of pounding thrilling chase scenes, scored to a techno beat. The movie's soundtrack is a mini film in itself, ranging from Handel, Górecki and Angelo Badalamenti via dissonant gear changes into the roar of thrash metal.

It wouldn't be difficult to thrill to Molinero and Salvador's film just for its evocative excavations and juxtapositions, its yearning to fathom a family that has disappeared into the folds of history. But the essential slippage of photographic 'truth' is very much the core of the movie's questioning, including a disarming semi-secret story tangent revolving around doctored photos that vanish a man's arm, and therefore save him (or not) by way of a second identity.

Despite our attention-deficit desire to see something new every moment, *The Mist in the Palm Trees* proves what many filmmakers, particularly Ozu and avant-gardists such as Warhol and James Benning, always knew – that the more you look at a single image, in one long viewing or in returning glimpses, the more mysterious it becomes. The nude woman, amid a slew of other strangely chaste nude studio shots, looking out at her photographer and/or husband and also looking out at us, becomes a totem for everything that has been lost unnaturally in the course of 20th-century madness. Perhaps inevitably, the film's final coda is a wholesale dissolution into nitrate self-destruction – there are people somewhere in the frantic bacterial collapse of the imagery, but they are just beyond our vision, unremembered ghosts receding from view, behind a veil of decomposition. Time, in other words.

Whether or not Molinero and Salvador's movie travels in particles and waves, and therefore can be read as meaningfully quantum, it remains a bewitching probe into questions every movie would raise if history was as much of a priority for us as ephemeral entertainment. And yet ephemerality is the ghost in the machine, the tragic heartbreak of the artform we had so hoped could battle mortality.

■ A region-free DVD of *'The Mist in the Palm Trees'* can be ordered direct from the producers at brothers@lasaulas.net

What the papers said



Bergson, writer, physicist, and sometime pornographer who sold arms to the Resistance in France, flirted with the Nazis, collaborated on Orson Welles' 'War of the Worlds' broadcast and helped build the A-Bomb. Unfortunately, Carlos Molinero and Lola Salvador's execution of their high-concept

collage falls far short of its initially intriguing premise. Partially narrated by 'Bergson' himself in a woman's voice, the disjointed mock biography is picked up by three different women in three different locations, all supposedly portraying the same daughter. At first, the film's borrowed imagery convincingly captures fragmentary afterimages of the past, forging fascinating floating links between politics, physics and phenomenology. But in the absence of a strong structure, chaos finally takes over."
Ronnie Scheib, 'Variety', June 2006

Blood, sweat and fears

Kim Newman spends five days tucking in to the vile delicacies on offer at London's FrightFest

The conviviality of this year's Film4 FrightFest, held at the Empire Leicester Square, was cramped by the you-can't-complain-it's-for-the-Olympics barrier around a mysterious project that has rendered the heart of their city off-limits to Londoners for months. One suspects some *Quatermass*-like unearthing of a dangerous ancient artefact – and almost hopes the sporting event will be trampled by giant trolls or infested with toothy imps as a consequence. Showing the Blitz spirit expected of horror fans in troubled times, audiences managed to get through to five days' worth of programming dedicated to more horror than even an aficionado can really keep up with (confession: I missed *Detention*, which many people loved).

With more varied output than in recent years, this edition leavened still-hanging-in-there sub-genres (torture porn, 3D, remakes, imaginary friends, rural nastiness, found footage, vampires) with a welcome return for the fantastical (ie more monsters, fewer psychos – even a new take on scary Santa in Dick Maas's *Saint*). The flagging people-are-awful sub-genre threw up the likes of Xavier Genes's cramped-in-a-bunker misery *The Divide*, the aptly named *Vile* or the Spanish home-invasion quickie *Kidnapped*, but by now relentless assaults on audience complacency tend to yield only shrugs. Soon-to-open crowd-pleasers like the Guillermo del Toro-produced *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* and the buzz-driven Norwegian giant-monster movie *Troll Hunter*, and they-are-what-they-are products like *Final Destination 5* (the 'dismount' was the talking-point death of the festival, despite strong competition) and *Fright Night* were salted throughout the long weekend, but most people sought out less-heralded fare.

It's not often remarked, but the UK is now producing horror movies – admittedly, many off-the-radar DVD or download releases – at a rate unequalled since the early 1970s. Ben Wheatley's *Kill List* was a signature film for this year's festival, but a similar mix of hard-boiled crime, social desperation, Pinteresque black comedy and the (possibly) demonic is managed by Sean Hogan's superbly played three-hander *The Devil's Business* and Cristian Solimeno's recession-flavoured *The Glass Man*.

If *Kill List* owes something to *The Wicker Man*, a totem for the current



Playing with fire: Robin Hardy's semi-sequel 'The Wicker Tree' and, below, Alex Chandon's Yorkshire-set horror 'Inbred'

crop of British genre creatives, so does Julian Gilbey's wilderness thriller *A Lonely Place to Die*, which brings on a pagan Scots holiday celebration to complicate its climax. Robin Hardy, director of *The Wicker Man*, returned this year with only his third feature, a semi-sequel formerly known as *The Riding of the Laddie* or *Cowboys for Christ* but now owning up to its faint-echo-of-past-glory approach as *The Wicker Tree* – and sorely missing the subtleties writer Anthony Shaffer brought to the original.

The muddy corners of the British Isles prove stereotypically unwelcoming for outsiders in three entries: cold comfort is found on the farm in Susan Jacobson's stalker/suspense *The Holding*; found footage is left on Dartmoor in Richard Perry's *A Night in the Woods* (a stronger effort in its category than the Spanish *Atrocious*); and Alex Chandon's *Inbred* pays Yorkshire-accented tribute to Herschell Gordon Lewis. Chris Crow's Welsh *Panic Button* – a strangers-in-an-enclosed-space horror with a fresh setting (a private jet) and an interesting social-networking milieu – looks at the fraying ends of lad culture in a demented manner, while Dan Turner's *Stormhouse* has a terrific premise (the military have captured a supernatural entity), but does sadly little with it.

All these trade in familiar elements of the national character, with a

collision between prissiness and crassness recurring – most impressively in the uneasy teaming of downsized suit Andy Nyman with thuggish debt collector James Cosmo in *The Glass Man*, but more typically with city folk abused, mutilated and sacrificed by rural degenerates. This theme is cheerfully turned on its head in the US offering *Tucker & Dale vs Evil*, as the rednecks turn out to be sweetly inept and the danger comes from an uptight college alpha male.

A few of the hot tickets didn't impress me much – Lucky McKee's *The Woman* is thinner than his previous work (it was upstaged by the surprisingly similar Swiss mystic mountain drama *Sennentuntschi*), while comedy-horror compendium *Chillerama* (featuring the less-fun-than-it-sounds 'The Diary of Anne Frankenstein') was close to unendurable. The 'Discovery' strand yielded interesting little surprises: the Israeli murders-in-the-woods picture *Rabies*; the low-key yet surprising serial-killer drama *A Horrible Way to Die*, which finds a new way to go over familiar material as an escaped killer reconnects in a surprising way with the wife who turned him in; and *My Sucky Teen Romance*, a post-*Twilight* vampire movie made for and by teenagers. (Writer-director Emily Hagens already shows more wit, maturity and sensitivity to genre than the four grown-ups behind *Chillerama*.)

A feature of FrightFest, boosted by Jamie Graham of sponsor *Total Film*, is the highlighting of a major genre director: this year Larry Fessenden – still less known than he ought to be, both as a writer-director (*Habit*, *Wendigo*, *The Last Winter*) and as an enabler-producer – talked sense in a one-on-one interview. But oddly he was represented on screen only by a film he produced, Ti West's excellent *The Innkeepers*, a woman-in-peril ghost story follow-up to 2009's *House of the Devil* with a terrific central performance from Sara Paxton.

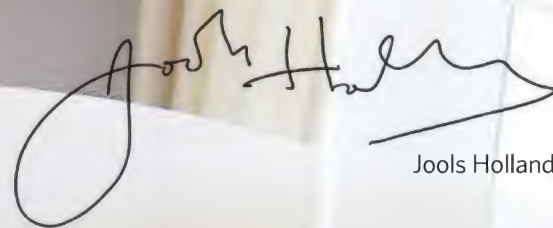
Serious (mostly) American horror was also represented by another omnibus, *The Theatre Bizarre*, collecting works from luminaries such as Richard Stanley, Buddy Giovinazzo, Tom Savini and David Gregory. Most are gruesome, extreme stories of couples falling out, but the best segment – operating on such a different level from the surrounding film that it's like finding a John Cheever short story in a *Tales from the Crypt* comic – is Douglas Buck's perfect vignette about love and death, 'The Accident'.

■ 'The Woman' is out now, and is reviewed on page 80; 'Don't Be Afraid of the Dark' is released on 7 October, and is reviewed on page 60

The UK is producing horror films at a rate unequalled since the 1970s



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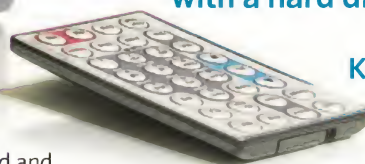


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Letter from Kazakhstan

I feel a little like Lincoln Steffens, the American journalist best known – indeed exclusively known – for coming back from Moscow in 1919 and telling American readers that he'd “seen the future – and it works”.

This was not what American business wanted to hear: the opening caption to *Orphans of the Storm*, released a couple of years later, tells its audience in no uncertain terms that, while Americans should thrill to a tale about the French revolution overthrowing tyrants, they should be careful not to follow any recent revolutionary example that might replace good ol' American democracy “with anarchy and bolshevism”.

So saying that we in Europe have a lot to learn from the Kazakh film industry is perhaps a little rash. But we do: it is producing films for local audiences as well as for festivals, without falling prey either to the funding crisis that has crippled the Russian film industry or to the endlessly repeated debates about distribution that go on in Europe. It just wants to make films.

Last summer I spent a few days in the Tianshan Mountains, a couple of evenings sampling the culinary delights of Almaty (I can recommend the fermented camel's milk) and a memorable morning's tour of Kazakhfilm Studios. Just as the British film industry was going through the business of transferring power from the UK Film Council to the BFI, it was interesting to get a completely different perspective. And especially one suffused with genuine – as opposed to formulaic – optimism.

In some ways it was like going back in time: Kazakhfilm Studios still feels like a Soviet-era production centre (not surprisingly, since that was what it was built to be). On the other hand, the country's oil, gas and mineral wealth and evident prosperity has brought with it a commitment to building a cinematic infrastructure and boosting national cultural identity through film. There is a sense of focused energy – of determination to make films for local audiences as well as for the international arthouse circuit – that has largely disappeared from most of Europe as a result of complex regulation (France), bureaucracy (Germany), confusion (Italy) and market speak (the UK).

So let's be specific. My reason for being in the Tianshan Mountains was to visit the set of a movie called *Myn Bala*, which I have written about elsewhere. The mountains themselves, though, seem to be a



Last summer I spent a couple of evenings sampling the culinary delights of Almaty and a memorable morning's tour of Kazakhfilm Studios

microcosm of the country: harshly beautiful, slightly dangerous, and blending modernity with tradition. They rise up from the Central Asian plain just a few miles south of Almaty like a wall and mark the border with Kyrgyzstan (a border that has been closed since that country erupted into violence last year).

Myn Bala needed special permission to shoot there, but I don't hold out much hope for the ski lodge where we stopped on the way to the set, with its offer of “corporate picnics and team-building adventures”. There was no sign of teams or picnics. Further down the mountain, though, the traditional restaurants – food cooked in a central kitchen and served in your individual yurt – appeared to be thriving.

Kazakhfilm is similarly both traditional and modern. It is a good deal larger than most other Soviet facilities, since the film industry decamped there en masse during World War II (Eisenstein shot *Ivan the Terrible* in Almaty) and did a lot of building. Its corridors are a strange mix of history and modernity – the long wing of cutting rooms are now stripped of their original editing equipment and have state-of-the-art computers standing in the middle of the floor like invading aliens.

“Our president inspires us,” remarks my guide dutifully as we pass a large photo of Nursultan Nazarbayev, president since independence in 1991. Nazarbayev has kept the huge country (the ninth largest in the world) stable and prosperous by reaching out in all directions: shipping oil to China,

gas to Russia and both to Iran in what is referred to locally as a ‘multi-vector’ foreign policy. Whatever the democratic status of the regime, the film industry is clearly a favoured son. The head of Kazakhfilm, Ermek Amanshaev, came to the job after a stint as deputy minister of culture and deputy mayor of Astana, the country's capital. Anywhere else, a move from positions like that to be head of the local film body would be seen as a demotion – imagine Boris Johnson as head of the BFI – but Amanshaev clearly doesn't see it that way. In the three years he has been in the job, he has managed an annual budget of \$75m and has set about steering the local film industry away from exotic fare about people in furs living in yurts – the kind of thing festival audiences were thought to prefer – towards a diet of more contemporary films, plus the occasional festival-destined art film and crossover epics such as *Myn Bala*. Local audiences have responded, and there is every sign that film occupies its rightful place in Kazakh life.

To anyone coming from the village-pump politics of European film, there was a startling clarity about the set-up. It also reminded me of another industry in an earlier age. I have been doing a lot of reading recently about the American film industry between 1896 and 1928. Kazakh film currently has that same sense of opportunity – of an industry responding to the demands of an audience, rather than trying to second-guess viewers jaded by a diet of junk film. It felt good.

◆ Nick Roddick

● **Afrika Eye Film Festival** opens with a screening of ‘Sing Your Song’, and showcases films from North Africa including ‘No More Fear’, about the recent Tunisian revolution. The festival also screens the documentary ‘Robert Mugabe... What Happened?’ by the festival's director, exiled Zimbabwean filmmaker Simon Bright. Watershed, Bristol, 28-30 October.

● **Kazakhstan Film Festival** showcases a selection of both old and recent films from the Central Asian country, taking in a number of genres and filmmakers. Films include ‘Kyz-Zhibek’, ‘Kelin’ and ‘The Sky of My Childhood’. Apollo, London, 24-30 October.

● **Mania: The History of a Cigarette Factory Worker**, a 1918 silent romance starring Pola Negri that was believed lost until it was recently rediscovered and digitally restored, is screened with live music composed by Jerzy Maksymiuk and performed by the Wrocław Philharmonic Orchestra. Barbican, London, 13 October.

● **Home Movie Day** encourages members of the public to bring their 8mm, 9.5mm and 16mm films to a free celebration of home movies, which includes a film clinic. Screenings include the home movies of actress Phyllis Calvert and publicist Ralph Cooper. The Cinema Museum, London, 15 October. See www.homemovieday.com/london



● **Africa in Motion**, the UK's largest African film festival, takes children as its overall theme this year. The festival opens with Tunisian director Nacer Khemir's fairytale ‘Bab ‘Aziz’. There is also a programme of films from this year's FESPACO festival, including ‘Notre étrangère’ (‘The Place in Between’, pictured) from Burkina Faso, and the Moroccan ‘Pegase’, which won FESPACO's top prize this year. Filmhouse, Edinburgh, 2-6 November.

● **Cornwall Film Festival** shows Cornish and Celtic-themed films, including Brett Harvey's ‘Weekend Retreat’ and Mark Jenkin's ‘Happy Christmas’ alongside a selection of recent features. Lighthouse Cinema, Newquay, 4-6 November.

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Kevin' **Page 16**

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Mexican director
Gerardo Naranjo's
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'Miss Bala' **Page 24**

THE BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL



INTRODUCTION

The timing of the BFI London Film Festival is its biggest advantage. Coming towards the end of the film year but neatly poised at the start of the campaigns for the awards season, it continues to offer the richest of packages to the film-hungry London crowds. Within these pages we've singled out Lynne Ramsay's coruscating *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the elegant silent restoration *The First Born*, the Dardenne brothers' deprived-child drama *The Kid with a Bike*, the Mexican beauty-queen thriller *Miss Bala*, the linked *Dreileben* trilogy shot by three German directors in different styles, a pair of breakthrough Tibetan films and a clutch of fasci-

nating documentaries. But we could equally well have featured a dozen more highlights, and indeed our top 20 recommendations (see p.32) will be extended to 30 online – and still there will be titles we feel we should have mentioned but didn't.

The most important aspect of this year's LFF selection for us is that it is the last put together under the leadership of Sandra Hebron, whose nine-year tenure in charge has seen the festival grow in reach and reputation. Hers has been a fine achievement, characterised by a willingness to take risks and by a commitment to the filmmakers whose works she most admires. This year's programme is a fitting send-off, drawn as it is from a fruitful year, particularly for British films that

occupy that smallish-budget, middle-market ground – films like *Kevin*, Steve McQueen's *Shame* (above) and Michael Winterbottom's *Trishna*.

As someone who this year has visited a different range of festivals from those we regularly attend – and who therefore might have expected to have seen a great deal of the programme in advance – I'm particularly intrigued by a World Cinema section that's largely unknown to me. And then there are the films that have slipped my grasp elsewhere. Everyone will have their own priorities, but the prime virtue of the London festival is that so many tastes are catered for. Whether your passion is for early cinema or artist's films or whatever, the October symphony beckons. **Nick James**



WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN



PHOTOGRAPH BY FABRIZIO MAUTESI

*Far more than just a straight adaptation of Lionel Shriver's hit novel, 'We Need to Talk About Kevin' bears the stamp of its director, Lynne Ramsay. She talks to **Hannah McGill***

It's only after doing my interview with Lynne Ramsay that I realise it took place on the very day of the Tomatina – the Spanish food-fight festival that provides the setting for the opening of her new film *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. Eva Khatchadourian, played by Tilda Swinton, is glimpsed in the days before she became a very unhappy mother, in the midst of a seething crush of people all coated in mashed-up tomatoes. The exotic anarchy of the Tomatina represents the freedom that Eva enjoyed pre-motherhood to

travel, explore and indulge her senses; but it also, in its slushy redness and unsettling physical abandon, prefigures the school massacre whereby her son, the teenage Kevin, will make himself such a talking point.

It's also a very Lynne Ramsay sequence: the radical drench of colour, the character's ecstatic state, the raw, unsafe sensuality. This opening firmly puts the director's aesthetic stamp on a film that could, in other hands, have found itself overdetermined by Lionel Shriver's popular and much-discussed source novel. Later, there's a mirroring of the Tomatina when Eva, hiding in a supermarket aisle from one of the parents of her sons' many victims, is framed in front of scarlet rows of tinned tomato soup. Her adventures have all been contained; her life reduced and confined.

Chopped for large parts of its duration into short scenes culled from different points in Eva's history, Ramsay's film condenses Shriver's very long and detailed narrative into punchy, telling vignettes. There's no voiceover to clarify where we are in time, just three actors to play Kevin at different ages, and different hairstyles marking Eva's age. Despite this impressionistic method, Ramsay achieves a surprising narrative intensity and cohesion – perhaps because her investment in and



knowledge of the project has been so prolonged and intense. Her connection to Shriver's book was immediate – but that was five years ago, when she was first sent a copy, and the book's runaway momentum had not yet gathered.

"It was the first thing I'd read that I thought was really original about a taboo subject: what if you don't like your child?" Ramsay recalls. "I just thought, 'I'm going to make this!'" BBC Films, who had previously passed on the book, agreed to make the film with Ramsay, and American support was offered by Summit Entertainment. But then Summit was busy with its mega-hit *Twilight* series – and after a year of what Ramsay calls "dancing", they pulled out.

"It was a bit of a bummer," admits the director, who had to slash her planned budget and start again on seeking investment. "This is a complicated project to make really low-budget. You've got kids. You've got an 18-year time span. You've got British finance, you've got American finance. It's *Fitzcarraldo* stuff! But basically I was like: 'I'm not giving up on this, no way.' I had to reconceive it for a lower budget – strip it back, but keep the core there." Necessity had its benefits: "It was getting shorter, but it was getting stronger, and becoming more my thing."

That the project should remain 'her thing' was clearly key for Ramsay, who had already been burned by a bestseller that got away. Ten years ago she and co-writer Liana Dognini worked long and hard on an adaptation of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, before the book became a massive success, DreamWorks got involved, and the project was passed to Peter Jackson. "I think I could suffer anything after that," she says grimly. "There were a lot of underhand deals and people got very greedy... I thought, 'This isn't me. I've got to get out of this.'"

She must have felt a degree of *schadenfreude* when Jackson's 2009 film was widely panned? "I had never thought it was a project that was going to work on that level," is all she will say. "I had a different take on it that was more psychological. I thought I was going somewhere really great with it. But I was naive – I was just off the back of an indie film. The thing to do in hindsight would have been to buy the rights myself. You learn from the hard knocks."

Ramsay's absence since *The Lovely Bones* fell

SINS OF THE SON

Eva (Tilda Swinton, both pics) hides from the parents of the victims of her son Kevin (Ezra Miller, far left) in the film by Lynne Ramsay, below left

through has led to a lot of 'where is she now?' speculation, and the occasional contention that the British film industry had failed to look after the woman whose first two films – *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *Morvern Callar* (2002) – had seen her so widely acclaimed. In fact Ramsay is reluctant to see *We Need to Talk About Kevin* as her comeback film. "I had a really good time stepping outside the film industry," she insists. "I was doing music. I was writing more. It's not like I haven't been doing anything! I've got other skills."

Indeed, Ramsay's creative multi-tasking is apparent when she talks about *Kevin*. She thinks like a producer in terms of the financing and building of the project, was intensely involved in casting and evidently took a very strong line on the film's visual style and editing. Seamus McGarvey shot the film – Ramsay's first time working without her regular DP Alwin Kuchler. "It was scary for me working with another DP," Ramsay acknowledges. "And a different editor, too [Joe Bini] – it was a totally new crew."

At times during the pressured 30-day shoot, Ramsay jokes, McGarvey had "fear in his eyes", but he proved to be a key collaborator. To combat their limited timeframe, he and Ramsay rigorously shot-listed the entire film before shooting; they also



Swinton's reputation certainly intimidated John C. Reilly. "He was like: 'She's a goddess! What's she doing with me?'"

◀ campaigned together for the producers to agree to the additional outlay of shooting in the wide 2.35:1 ratio. "They were afraid it was too expensive, but it was the saving grace of it," says Ramsay. "Because you've got a wide frame with Scope, I could do a *mise en scène* within it – I could create the frames very precisely and specifically. So that saved us loads of time."

The wide frame also allowed Ramsay and McGarvey to confer an epic feel on a film that might easily have felt too interior and claustrophobic. *Kevin* is distinguished by their careful, spacious compositions, by their unsettling play with physical space and the gaps between people, and by the near-theatrical atmosphere evoked by the use of very few, largely indoor locations. Most striking of these is the horrid, showy Connecticut house that Eva's husband Franklin (John C. Reilly) buys for the family – the stuff of smug suburban nightmares for bohemian Eva, and soon a battleground for her and Kevin.

"That mansion house was so creepy," says Ramsay. "There are so many of those follies out there, especially in Connecticut. I talked to the designers a lot about making it seem like a set, even though it wasn't a set – because everything is becoming a performance within their family." The

idea of performed jollity – as a facet of parenting, and perhaps as a facet of American life in general – runs through Ramsay's film, from Franklin's impervious golly-gee affability towards his bratish son to the comically grotesque office party that Eva attends in a doomed effort to reconnect socially after the massacre. The doctor's office where Eva seeks some explanation for Kevin's dull and sullen toddlerhood, meanwhile, is decorated with clown portraits straight out of a horror film. Such witty touches, along with the spikiness of Swinton's performance, decisively distance the film from morose melodrama or weepy pity for Eva's fate.

From the inside

Ramsay's films has a good deal of dark humour too, which honours the acerbic tone of Shriver's book. "I wasn't trying to do this as a big issue-based movie," Ramsay insists. "For one thing, you say 'high-school massacre' to people and they'll run a mile. I don't even like that being mentioned – I say it's a mother-and-son story." This meant emphasising Eva's subjectivity, rather than looking on Kevin from the outside. We see events through Eva's eyes – which of course means that we may not be getting the full picture. (Given world

enough and time, Ramsay says she'd love to make two more films of the same story: Kevin's perspective and Franklin's. "But that might take up the rest of my career.") Also emphasised, sometimes poignantly, are the similarities between Eva and Kevin: the unavoidable fact that his sharpness and stubbornness mirror her own; the sense that they share more with one another than either of them shares with the jolly bear Franklin.

Chemistry between Tilda Swinton and Ezra Miller, who plays the teenage Kevin, was instant and complex. "When I saw them together, there was a kind of symmetry with their cheekbones," Ramsay recalls. "And he was sort of poking at her. She didn't always like it – she was uncomfortable right away." Miller's performance is astute: his Kevin is neither a dreamy rebel outsider nor a cookie-cutter baby psycho, but a complex creature whose sneering arrogance coexists with a palpable vulnerability. Ramsay wondered initially if Miller was "too beautiful" for the role, but decided that his lush looks added a dimension: "You want to like him... You're drawn, but you're repelled."

Swinton, meanwhile, cheerfully resolved to "get her 'old bag' on" as Eva. "She looked terrible," laughs Ramsay. "We were always getting make-up to make her look worse, and older." But it was



Swinton's willingness to pitch in and rub along with the constraints of a project that couldn't stretch to trailers and assistants that persuaded Ramsay she was right for the part. "At first I thought she was too exotic," she admits. "She's cold, she's androgynous, we've seen her in very exotic roles and there's an otherness about her – although she's a really cool person, she's down to earth. I'd met her over the years and I knew she wanted to work with me on something. She really loved the subject-matter." So much, indeed, that she offered to audition. "She doesn't need to audition for people! I thought, 'There's a willingness here. What about making her a bit less exotic? What about making her a bit less Tilda Swinton?'"

That force of reputation certainly intimidated John C. Reilly, who plays her husband. "He thought she was so beautiful," Ramsay recalls. "He was like: 'She's a goddess! What's she doing with me?' Franklin's more of an all-American hunk in the book, but I found that a bit 2D. I'd considered John early on – he brought a real warmth. Considering the madness of it, it was very chilled-out on set."

Contributing to the madness were American rules and regulations with which Ramsay had not previously had to contend. "Some of the rules are so bonkers that it's quite Kafkaesque," she says. She

couldn't select her own stills photographer because union rules demand the use of a union member – or a fee of \$20,000, to which the production couldn't stretch. A brief sequence in which Eva wheels Kevin's buggy up to a jackhammer on a New York street just to have his crying drowned out for a moment necessitated "seven, eight meetings about the jackhammer". Right up to the brink of filming, the project still seemed on shaky ground. "But [*Twilight* director] Catherine Hardwicke said something to me once: sometimes it's best to make a date and say, 'I'm going to do it then.' A sort of will to power thing."

Ramsay's will reaped approving results at Cannes – and the blessing of the frequently caustic Lionel Shriver, with whom the director had had minimal contact during the making of the film. "I've got to do my own thing," Ramsay explains. "I'm sure it was frustrating for her at points – but she didn't really want to get involved. I think she thought I would change it a lot more than I did. When she came to the first screening, it was quite terrifying – but she loved it. She gave me a big hug."

NATURE OR NURTURE

Is there a connection between the crimes of Kevin (Ezra Miller, above) and the parenting of Eva and Franklin (John C. Reilly, right on facing page)?

Shriver's book stimulated intense debate regarding the subject of maternal ambivalence and the extent to which parenting moulds behaviour, but as Ramsay notes, it also struck multiple chords with parents who have entertained guiltily negative thoughts about their own children. "A lot of people can really relate to Eva," Ramsay says. And, perhaps, to the clash between Eva's career and her parental responsibilities. Not a parent yet, although she has "been thinking about it", Ramsay notes that "it's very hard to have a child if you're a woman director, unless you have a partner who's got loads of money, or will be a house-husband."

We may expect more fretful column inches about bad seeds and maligned mothers when *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is released. Some of them, doubtless, will accuse Ramsay of glamorising her sultry teen antihero. Is she concerned? "There's so much black-and-white stuff out there," she says. "But for me the best stuff is exciting because it's not tracing a straightforward path. Some people have already said, 'I really like Kevin!' That's pretty scary, but if it's done that job, then I'm happy."

■ *'We Need to Talk About Kevin' screens at the London Film Festival on 17 & 18 October, is released on 21 October, and is reviewed on page 79*



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK WALL

SANDRA HEBRON

This year's BFI London Film Festival is the last under its current artistic director Sandra Hebron, after a nine-year run. She talks to Nick James

METHOD IN THE MADNESS

Michael Fassbender as Jung and Keira Knightley as his patient/lover in Cronenberg's 'A Dangerous Method', which has its UK premiere at this year's LFF



Nick James: What are the big changes that have happened to cinema in your time as director of the LFF – from the perspective of running a film festival?

Sandra Hebron: In relation to the LFF, the profile of the festival is higher than when I came. Though I'd love to say this is all down to what we've done, it's actually a combination of factors: partly to do with the festival, partly with the time of year we happen. Certainly with the bigger titles, that position in relation to the awards campaign has really helped us.

People's knowledge of, interest in and appetite for festivals is greater than it's ever been. If you look at the reporting of festivals from all around the world, there are more people who have access to that. There's a very high level of awareness both of festivals and individual titles within them, and there's something about the festival experience. If you think of what's happened, not just in film but in music and even more curiously perhaps in areas like literature, there is an appetite for the shared collective experience. Our cultural consumption is now increasingly individual, domestic, private, and yet at the same time festivals are absolutely flourishing – it seems that there's a reaction against it, a desire to come together.

The other big changes have clearly been in the technology of production. I had forgotten this, but somebody reminded me of a piece that I'd written in 2003 when I first got this particular role in the festival. I wrote, "This year we've looked at 2500 films" – and of course now we are looking at over 4000. In part that has to do with access to production technology, and in the UK in particular we've seen a change in the number of titles that have been submitted. There's less of a reliance on people waiting for funding to become available, and more of a desire to get on and make something. Now that doesn't necessarily mean that all these films follow through into the programme, but it's certainly affecting what comes in for us to look at.

NJ: Can you give me a couple of high points from your time as director.

SH: A disproportionate amount of attention gets focused on certain bits of the festival, so because it's a privilege and perk of the job, I guess I like being in a position to select titles for opening night, where I've been able to screen films that might not have been in some other festivals and might not have been the most obvious choices for opening night – things like *Dirty Pretty Things* for the first opening night I selected, *Vera Drake* and particularly *In the Cut*. That film divided people, but I still feel very strongly about its merits. To be able to take a film that's not conventional opening-night fare and give it enough position to ensure a lot of discussion about it, I would say that's a real high point.

The other thing that I've mentioned to other people – because it seemed so profoundly un-British – are the occasions when audiences have given films standing ovations. The first time it happened to us was with David Lynch and *The Straight Story* – truthfully the ovation was for Richard Farnsworth, and properly so. It also happened with *The Magdalene Sisters* and *Bowling for Columbine*.

NJ: In the whole process of planning and putting on the festival, which aspect gives you the most pleasure?

We have an awful lot of films about suicide or psychosis – films that provoke

SH: There's a massive pleasure in being able to introduce, talk to, ask questions of those people who have been very intimately and creatively involved with a work. Sometimes that's not necessarily about formal introductions or Q&As. It's also pleasurable when you witness moments that are not scheduled. Being there when Guy Maddin and Paul Thomas Anderson happened to both come out of their screenings for a breather in the Odeon West End bar and sat down, and they'd never met each other and they discovered this shared love of Chet Baker and a whole series of other musicians. I actually had to separate them and get them back into their screenings to do their Q&As!

One of the things that is lovely and seems to happen particularly with the Mexican directors is when filmmakers come out to support other filmmakers' work. You get all kinds of people popping up who we didn't even know were in London.

NJ: There seem to be fewer Hollywood films showing at the festival these days, or is that more to do with the quality of the studios' current output?

SH: I'm not sure if there are fewer of them. Obviously the thing that gets talked about a lot is that there was a flourishing of festival-type films coming from the boutique arms of the major studios, and now that doesn't happen so much. But having said that, there's still a reasonable number of films to take through Fox Searchlight and Sony Pictures Classics.

There's been a change in the time that I've been at the festival. I was looking earlier in the week at 'Film on the Square': when I first started, in 1999, every single film was American, or the odd British title – all English-language. It was a deliberate change to move it away from that. There are some films in that programme that would not now get in – we'd be putting in European and world titles instead.

NJ: How does this year's LFF, say, differ from back then?

SH: What I'm really looking forward to – and it's quite tricky in terms of trying to say this to the audience – is that there's a lot of work this year that goes beyond the purely entertaining, and requires thought and time to deal with some fairly major and often quite difficult issues.

I've said rather flippantly that we have an awful lot of films about murder or suicide or psychosis. To which someone replied, that sounded like a good night out to them. If you think about the big titles, things like Steve McQueen's *Shame*, David Cronenberg's *A Dangerous Method* and even Michael Winterbottom's [*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* adaptation] *Trishna* – Thomas Hardy, that's not exactly an uplifting ending – but also things like *Michael* and *Snowtown*, there are a lot of films that do provoke in the best possible way, and that is always a good thing for a festival to be doing.



TROUBLE AND STRIFE

Director/star Miles Mander and Madeleine Carroll in 'The First Born', a film that shows the touch of its screenwriter Alma Reville, aka Mrs Hitchcock

intimate film never feels staid or static. On this evidence, her influence on her husband's films may have been even greater than we thought. There is an astonishingly 'modern', arguably Hitchcockian, voyeuristic shot: a first-person perspective by means of sweeping handheld camera as Hugo (Mander) stalks through the bedroom to catch his wife in the bath.

Paul Rotha, writing in his seminal 1930 book *The Film Till Now*, thought the film showed tremendous promise, but had been hacked about. Perhaps this had something to do with how he saw it; clearly something had gone awry at the trade showing – *The Bioscope* commented that it had been badly projected. Had Reville been around, it seems unlikely anything could have gone wrong in the edit, but she was preoccupied with the birth of her daughter Patricia. Either way, the physical material handed down to the BFI Archive had plenty of problems to keep the restoration team fully occupied.

As with many silent films, the print that the BFI acquired of *The First Born* had been abridged for rerelease at some stage, and had lost a lot of footage. Small sections were missing throughout the film, leading to jumps in the action. The worst of these was the 'disappearing housemaid' in the bedroom scene: she comes in with a letter and hands it to Hugo, then suddenly just isn't there! We were able to replace her with some 16mm material kindly loaned to us from the collection of our archival colleagues at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. Matching this new mate-

THE FIRST BORN

Newly restored, this 1928 British silent is awash with Hitchcockian resonances, says the National Film Archive's **Bryony Dixon**

Archivists are often asked how they choose which film to restore – and given the expense and the huge number of man hours that go into a film restoration, the question is a valid one. But some films just suggest themselves, and *The First Born* (1928) rises to the surface for a number of reasons. It's a beautifully made late silent film drawing on all the techniques learned by successive generations of filmmakers in cinema's formative years.

Tackling sensitive 'adult' issues, *The First Born* shows the artistic ambition of its star and director Miles Mander (who also wrote the play it's based on, *The Common People*). What's more, it was the film that launched the career of Madeleine Carroll, later famous for her work with Hitchcock on *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *The Secret Agent* (1936).

Perhaps even more significantly for us today, it's an example of the work of one of our finest screenwriters, Alma Reville, as distinct from the better-known later work she did with Hitchcock – who was also, of course, her husband. In fact Hitchcock connections seem to abound – Mander of course starred in Hitchcock's first film *The Pleasure Garden* (1925) and also appeared in the talkie *Murder!* (1930) – so it's a good moment to see this film in advance of the BFI's restoration and reassessment of Hitchcock's nine silent works.

The First Born concerns an upper-class married couple of the political set. They are passionate about each other but have irreconcilable issues: she is loyal but possessive, he is a serial philanderer who every time he finds his wife's jealousy unbearable goes off to North Africa to enjoy the freedom of his 'spiritual home' in the arms of his non-white mistresses. The arguments are occasioned by her 'failure' to produce the longed-for heir, and she resorts to deception to lure him back. At first sight it looks straightforward – him bad, her good – but there are layers of complexity in Mander's original story, subtly told and honed by the experienced Reville, who almost certainly supplied the film's 'Hitchcockian' touches.

Better remembered as a Hollywood character actor, with bit parts in such films as *Wuthering Heights* (1939), *To Be or Not to Be* (1942) and *Murder My Sweet* (1944), Mander was a multi-talented and energetic man full of creative spark. He was very driven; a younger son from a wealthy dynasty of industrialists and radical politicians, he himself once stood for parliament as a Labour candidate. Everything he did, he did with great exuberance: he went to university in Canada; he was a sheep rancher in New Zealand, a racing driver and a pioneer aviator; he married a maharaja's daughter (it ended badly); he wrote plays and novels, acted in and directed films.

But what I find most fascinating about *The First Born* is the opportunity to see how Reville contributed to the screenplay. Tightly written, it's full of elegant solutions, which were her particular talent. There are combinations of shots that condense the action so that what's really quite an

Reville's influence on Hitchcock may have been greater than we thought

rial into the 35mm British print has been a labour of love for the restoration team. We have also been able to bring back the film's original tinting scheme, which is very delicate in shades of amber, lavender and pink.

The First Born will be the LFF's third Archive Gala – an event that has already become an eagerly anticipated fixture in the festival schedule. An integral part of the gala experience is the commissioning of a new musical score. We are lucky in this country in having some of the finest specialists in silent-film accompaniment, including Stephen Horne, whose particular aptitude for scoring this sort of sensitive emotional drama was borne out by his charming score for the BFI's 2008 restoration of *A Cottage on Dartmoor* (1929).

■ *The First Born* is the London Film Festival's Archive Gala on 20 October at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, accompanied by a live performance of the new score by Stephen Horne



THE KID WITH A BIKE

It may deal with family breakdown, but Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's latest 'The Kid with a Bike' marks a step in a (slightly) sunnier direction for the brothers, they tell **Geoff Andrew**



Brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne have few equals in terms of consistently magnificent filmmaking, as their Cannes track record attests: their last five films have won five major awards, including two Palmes d'Or. Their latest film *The Kid with a Bike* (*Le Gamin au vélo*) may differ from its predecessors in small, subtle ways, but its tale of 11-year-old Cyril, abandoned by his father and suddenly appealing to a total stranger for help and a home that isn't an institution, has all the virtues we now expect from the brothers' work: dramatic suspense, precise *mise en scène*, social and psychological precision, moral complexity and a profoundly humane compassion.

The sunny, smiling poster image is a touch misleading; notwithstanding a summer setting and a central character (played for once in the Dardenne's career by an established star, Cécile de France) notable for her easy-going generosity, the film's as bracingly honest, lucid and rigorously unsentimental as *Rosetta* (1999), *The Son* (*Le Fils*, 2002) or their other films. The following interview took place in Cannes a few days before the film was awarded the Grand Prix du Jury.

Geoff Andrew: How did the idea for 'The Kid with a Bike' initially arise?

Luc Dardenne: When we were in Japan for the release of *The Son*, a judge there told us about a boy left in an orphanage by his father, who told him he'd come back for him but never did; the boy waited and waited, climbed on the roof, fled the orphanage. And we had a script that was going

RAY OF HOPE

Abandoned by his father (Jérémie Renier, below left), Cyril (Thomas Doret, both pics) turns to Samantha (Cécile de France, top left) in the new film by the Dardenne brothers, right

nowhere about a doctor called Samantha, so we thought of merging the two stories, so that Samantha came to love the boy and tried to soothe his anger about his father's disappearance. We felt a doctor was too heavily metaphorical, so we made the woman a hairdresser. And for some reason we'd always imagined the boy on a bike; he could express his violence through it, cycling fast or doing acrobatics with it.

GA: The film's incredible energy comes from him.

LD: And the bike!

GA: Your published diaries often mention literature and myths, but the press notes for this film describe it as a kind of fairytale.

Jean-Pierre Dardenne: I remember that during our long, intense discussions over the script, we did talk about 'Tom Thumb'. Of course our film's very different from that story, but this was the first time we'd spoken about the world of fairytales. In this film the characters, apart from Cyril, are complete, simple, straightforward. Samantha has no false or secret layers, no underlying thoughts; similarly, the older boy Wes is a 'baddie' who in the film really has only one objective. Characters drawn that way perhaps bring it closer to fairytale.

But there's also its geography: the street, houses, road and forest. When we first filmed Cyril running into the forest, we used a medium shot, but it felt wrong so we moved the camera back. And there he was – tiny and, for all his inner strength, very fragile, surrounded by huge trees. That's when the idea of a fairytale really took hold.

GA: This film differs from your others in that it doesn't have an inner-city setting.

LD: Also, we shot in summer for the first time! Besides the bike, from the start we had in our minds the idea of a fall – a chase that ended at a tree. If we were to keep that, there had to be leaves to hide behind, so we had to shoot in summer! That made a surprising difference: not only could we dress lightly instead of being all wrapped up, but there'd be a play of light – a warmer light

which, without being too metaphorical, could reflect the love Samantha offers the boy. Besides, to have him on his bike out in the rain, wind and cold would have exaggerated his suffering too much.

J-PD: What we were trying to show was how the love Samantha offers the boy could save him. He doesn't save himself on his own. When he asks for help, she simply decides, for no particular reason, to save him from his destiny. We'd never tried to deal with such an impulse before; usually there's evil looming in our films, and even here Cyril's father abandons him – because that's the cause of his anger. But in creating a bridge between Samantha and Cyril, we had to find a way to show that relationship without being sentimental, at the same time as not being afraid of the emotions involved. So we decided just to have Samantha say, "You're alone, abandoned, and I'll take care of you. You asked me, and I'll do it." And we wanted to leave it at that. Many people who read the script said, "Don't you think Samantha should have more objective reasons?" But we always said no; we liked the challenge of trying to make the audience believe in Samantha's gift.

GA: So did you cast Cécile de France as Samantha because you felt she could play the role without any overt psychological explanation?

LD: For years people have been telling us that as two straight men directing together, we wouldn't be able to work well with real professional actresses, because they like to respond to the vision of a single director. There's said to be such an element of alchemy or seduction that we felt quite intimidated – maybe we'd even get jealous! But we really wanted to work with Cécile. For starters, she's from Seraing [the Belgian town that has been the setting for most of the Dardenne's films to date]. But also we felt she could play someone who is really there, without lots of different levels of motivation. We felt the audience would see her and, by the end of the film, accept what she did, even if they weren't entirely certain why she did it.

And she was great. She helped the boy, and understood that she needed to be like him: innocent and pure, without technique. It's precisely thanks to her technique that she was able to eliminate technique. She worked so hard! When Cyril first meets Samantha, he knocks her on to a concrete floor; we made Cécile do that scene 18 times and she never once complained. But please don't tell anyone that, or no one will want to work with us!

GA: Why of all the boys auditioned did you select Thomas Doret to play Cyril?

J-PD: He was actually the fifth boy we saw on the first day, and even though we saw everyone else, we both immediately knew it would be him. We had everyone do a simplified version of the first scene in which Cyril tries to phone his father and gets no reply; with Thomas it felt as if he really was waiting for his father to answer. Also, he has an

incredible memory (from the first day of rehearsals he knew all his lines), great concentration and real inner strength. At the age of six he was made to do karate because he was small and hyperactive, and he still has some of that: he speaks fast, moves fast, has quick gestures.

GA: That reminds me of the lovely shot of Cyril cycling at night: one of a few instances where for the first time you use non-diegetic music – six bars of Beethoven's 'Emperor Concerto'.

LD: Those 22 seconds of the 'Adagio' have a feeling of immensely consoling tenderness. We wanted it to show what's missing from Cyril's life: love, which Samantha will offer him. It's as if this piece of music might diminish the fear of being alone and fatherless – of dying, for without love this boy feels he'll die. So the music's a measure of his suffering.



GA: It also highlights the film's three-act structure.

J-PD: Yes, like a bell ringing. Our editor said the same thing.

GA: Because Cyril's father is played by Jérémie Renier, he could almost be the same person he played in your 2005 film 'The Child' ('L'Enfant') – but now older, of course.

J-PD: Maybe! But that's not why we chose him. We just find working with him hugely enjoyable; he likes to surprise us, and despite his precision, there's a real freedom in his acting that we love. Thomas was really happy to be working with Jérémie, because he'd asked us to show him [the Dardenne's 1996 film] *La Promesse*, in which Jérémie, as it happens, had been the same age as Thomas. So he could see Jérémie as a child of his own age as well as the adult he turned into, and in a way he identified with him. There was a very real communication between the two of them.

GA: While it's more fluid than it was in your last feature 'The Silence of Lorna' ('Le Silence de Lorna', 2008), your camera style here is less kinetic than it was in 'Rosetta' or 'The Son'.

LD: We'd never rehearsed so much before, and this time we found the shots we wanted during rehearsals. During the shoot we tried new angles, but we nearly always returned to the shots we'd found earlier. It's as if they really were there out of necessity. And we had far fewer tracking shots and many more pans – much simpler. It's as if we wanted to be less shocking, more straightforward. But let's see what happens with our next film!

'Usually there's something evil looming in our films. We had to find a way to show the relationship without being sentimental'

■ 'The Kid with a Bike' is the 'Sight & Sound' special screening at the BFI London Film Festival on 21 & 23 October



MISS BALA

The story of a would-be beauty queen who falls foul of Mexico's drug gangs, 'Miss Bala' is more than just another document of Latin America's social ills, says **Paul Julian Smith**

You could hardly wish for a higher concept: beauty queens meet drug barons. And Mexican director Gerardo Naranjo has a flashy track record: in *Drama Mex* (2006) glossy model-types emote in beach houses in scenic Acapulco; in *I'm Gonna Explode* (*Voy a explotar*, 2008) sexy teens with cars and guns run wild in historic Guanajuato. Even the co-production between Fox International Productions (the specialist division of a US major) and Canana (Diego Luna and Gael García Bernal's boutique Mexican outfit) fits the new film's theme – like the movie, the drug business will prove to be transnational, boosted by cross-border collaboration.

Miss Bala's title also boasts a cool pun. While *bala* means 'bullet' in Spanish, it also rhymes with *Baja* – as in Baja California, the state whose beauty pageant is hijacked by the local mafia in the film. The script (for which Naranjo takes co-credit) is based on a collage of headlines ripped from the

front pages. A real-life beauty queen – Miss Sinaloa, named, like Naranjo's character, Laura – was indeed charged with gang membership; an agent of the US Drug Enforcement Administration was recently killed by organised crime; and, as is well known, US weapon sales to Mexican cartels (also shown in the film) are massive and lucrative, in spite of loud American complaints of drug smuggling from south of the border.

But if the troubling truth is, indeed, stranger than fiction, then cinema has already been active in this area. Mexican audiences, who might seem to have good reason to forget their country's real-life drug wars when they seek entertainment at the cinema, have recently flocked to two hit films on the topic that have been little seen abroad. Luis Estrada's *Hell* (*El infierno*, 2010) is a pitch-black state-of-the-nation comedy, in which an emigrant returns to find that his pueblo has been taken over by the gangs – and that there is nothing to celebrate in the year of the centenary of the Mexican Revolution. Beto Gómez's *Saving Private Pérez* (*Salvando al soldado Pérez*, 2011), meanwhile, is a clownish farce, in which an incompetent *narco* seeks to rescue his brother, who has been kidnapped in Iraq. Both rely on the clichéd figure of the crime boss in his white suit and gold chains.

But there's more to Naranjo's film than such stereotypes and facile contrasts. In the opening shot of *Miss Bala*, the camera pans over glamorous pictures pinned on a bedroom wall, including tragic icon Marilyn. A motto reads (in English): "Fashion Victim". But for the future Miss Bala/Baja,

TARNISHED ANGEL
In Gerardo Naranjo's 'Miss Bala', Laura (Stephanie Sigman, both pics) discovers that in Mexico even beauty contests are controlled by the drug cartels

the cliché will prove literally true. After a failed audition for a beauty pageant, the initially unglamorous Laura (played by impressive newcomer Stephanie Sigman) is taken by a friend to a seedy nightclub. Naranjo (or perhaps his DP, the Hungarian Mátyás Erdély) chooses to shoot the scene in depth, respecting the complexity of this unusual space. While Laura waits placidly in the bathroom, inspecting herself in the mirror, behind her and to the left we glimpse a surreal sight: gunmen drop silently down the wall into a corridor, in preparation for a massacre. Belatedly becoming aware of this invasion, Laura sinks to the floor and retreats into a corner. A drug baron (who she will later discover is called Lino), shown only from the waist down, comes into shot and listlessly tosses a roll of bills down to her.

This first shot of the unprepossessing Lino, in which he is faceless, is vital. Naranjo allows no identification with – much less celebration of – the drug barons. And by scoring the whole nightclub sequence to annoyingly repetitive *norteño* dance music, the low-key drama is disconcertingly heightened. After this initial chance encounter, there will be no escape for Laura from the tentacles of all-too-organised crime.

Against all expectations, *Miss Bala* shapes up as a surprisingly thoughtful thriller. There is unaccustomed solemnity in the pace of shooting and cutting, not to mention impressively underplayed performances from novices Sigman and Noé Hernández (as Lino). In his extended press notes, Naranjo insists on the violence and inequality of life in Mexico, tracing the narcos' ghoulish mutilation of their victims' bodies (illustrated daily on the front pages of newspapers) back to Aztec rituals that were equally gory. But his comments say more about a certain kind of Mexican self-image than they do about the film itself. In fact explicit violence is conspicuous by its absence in most of *Miss Bala*. And it's only after some 70 minutes of screen time that Naranjo finally allows himself an action set piece – an operatic inferno filmed on the city street where Laura is caught in the crossfire between cartel and police.

As the film develops, we see that the deceptively simple technique rather than the high-profile subject matter is where its real originality lies. Surprisingly, perhaps, Laura is consistently shot from behind, her dark hair hanging down her back. The audience is thus encouraged to adopt the POV of this stranger in a strange world – a familiar enough strategy. But with our vision partially obscured by Laura's head, the viewer is as disorientated as the increasingly shell-shocked character, who time and again wanders or blunders into mayhem. Naranjo has noted the lack of close-ups in his film, which denies us easy psychological proximity. But perhaps even more important is his frequent use of shallow focus: when two characters are shot together, more often than not one person's image will be blurred. This is a society whose citizens are isolated from one another even when they share the same space.

In the same way, *Miss Bala* favours dreamy Steadicam shots that are difficult to interpret. In one early sequence, for example, the camera floats woozily over the heads of would-be contestants at the Miss Baja contest, suggesting that something





Laura remains throughout an accidental – and increasingly traumatised – tourist in the foreign territory of organised crime

◀ strange is in the air. And indeed, as Laura drifts ever further into drug territory, the things she sees (and we see) become yet more surreal. Thus when the criminals induce her to transport money across the border, a lengthy sequence shows great wads of bills being solemnly taped to her slim waist. And after she is crowned queen (the drug cartels even control the beauty business), she is dumped outside town at night, and attempts to make her way across the desert dressed in high heels, chandelier earrings and a satiny pageant dress.

Much later, Laura will be led into an equally incongruous scenario: a luxury hotel, where guests sit placidly in a courtyard oblivious to the violence outside. Here she has an assignation with an elderly general – apparently all part of the job for beauty queens. The scene is shot by Naranjo, however, through the billowing clouds of the hotel-room humidifier, lending a surreal visual quality to an already sordid setting. And the odd couple's tryst will soon be interrupted by a squadron of soldiers in black masks, eerily reminiscent of Darth Vader.

Everyday crimes

The late Argentine writer Julio Cortázar wrote a short story called 'Casa tomada' (literally 'taken house'), in which a home is gradually invaded by unknown and unseen forces, obliging the complacent inhabitants to fall back and finally flee their living quarters. Once taken as an allegory of political repression (suggesting that the bourgeoisie sat idly by during the rise of dictatorships in Latin America), the story could now just as well apply to the insidious growth of the drug cartels. Indeed in Naranjo's chilling vision, gangs – far from being glamorous – seem stubbornly everyday, their activ-

ities bleeding into the domestic life of the nation. Typically, Laura is given a homely *nom de guerre* by her comrades in arms: Canelita ('little cinnamon'). And when she manages briefly to escape back to her modest home, it's soon taken over by gang members, who spread out a prodigious display of weapons on the domestic floor. The house (like Laura herself and, Naranjo would suggest, all of Mexico) is well and truly taken.

At another point Naranjo cuts from the wounded gang members being ferried home in a truck – who are conspicuously unattractive – to glamorous beauty contestants rehearsing a Bob Fosse-style number in tights and hats. It's a kind of contrastive editing that, given the film's premise, is surprisingly rare in *Miss Bala* – and is never used for cheap shock value or facile irony. Rather it points to a key insight: that it's increasingly hard to distinguish between contestants and casualties. While it would be a stretch to say that the merciless beauty business is as cut-throat as drug running, the former is shown to be wholly complicit with the latter.

Naranjo thus undercuts the most pervasive and seductive female myth in Latin America. Put simply, Laura is the anti-Ugly Betty. Model-tall and skinny from the start, she would seem to be ready for a Betty-style makeover. And like Betty, once more, Laura's true beauty will be revealed by the end of the story: she is professionally made up and coiffed before staggering out on stage to win the longed-for contest. But unlike Betty (who got to marry her cute boss in the final episode), this new look brings Laura no personal or professional success. She remains throughout the film an accidental – and increasingly traumatised – tourist in the foreign territory of organised crime.

During the pageant, Laura is asked if her dream is money or fame. Struck dumb by her trials, she can answer only with tears. The oleaginous MC praises her "genuine emotion" as she stumbles off stage. It is a rare and bitter moment of humour, equalled only when Laura, finally paraded as a criminal on TV, is condemned for bringing the supposed good name of the beauty-pageant business (so superficial and corrupt) into disrepute.

In spite of such bizarre moments, Naranjo has spoken of the social accuracy of his depiction and his desire to educate foreigners in what is happening in his country. His film is certainly a welcome antidote to images of narcos in popular film as Robin Hoods or comic heroes. Yet in spite of undeniable and grotesque violence in Mexico (there has been a fearsome toll of casualties since the current president enlisted the army to fight crime), the country's murder rate remains less than that of, say, Brazil, which attracts much less media attention. Americans are also unlikely to be aware that homicides in the capital Mexico, D.F. (Mexico City) are half those in Washington, D.C.

Moreover, while Naranjo claims in the press notes that his home country suffers the greatest inequality of income in the world, absolute poverty has in fact fallen, helped by initiatives such as a government cash-transfer programme that has been adopted as a model as far away as New York. *The Economist* wrote recently that the true cartels holding Mexico to ransom are not the drug gangs, but the monopolies in areas such as telephony (controlled by Mexican business magnate Carlos Slim, the world's richest man), which charge ordinary Mexicans inflated fees for their services. Those same ordinary Mexicans prefer their local films to be comedies – it's often foreigners who fund and distribute titles on the continuing social ills of Latin America. As one Mexican commentator wrote wryly, films like *Miss Bala* seems designed to make foreigners feel sorry for his home country.

Whether or not this is the case, Naranjo certainly succeeds in directing sympathy towards his hapless and hopeless protagonist. Laura will finally be set free by the police, who are in league with the cartel, but she is still dumped on a desolate street. The sound design is innovative here once more: we hear only a roar of white noise, which is impossible to interpret. This last sequence is a reminder that, in spite of its claims to reflect contemporary Mexico, *Miss Bala* cannot be reduced to realism. Naranjo's film offers no facile psychological analysis of the criminals whose unglamorous daily lives it documents. But it also offers no easy remedy for the nightmarish social conditions to which it attests.

At the time of writing, *Miss Bala* has not yet opened in Mexican cinemas. But if local audiences fear that the film will trivialise or sensationalise their country's predicament, they are wrong. When beauty queens meet drug barons, the financial stakes may be high, but in Naranjo's impressive and ambitious feature, the artistic stakes are higher still.

■ "Miss Bala" screens at the BFI London Film Festival on 19, 20 & 22 October, is released on 28 October, and is reviewed on page 67

**FROM NA HONG-JIN
THE ACCLAIMED DIRECTOR
OF *THE CHASER***

THE YELLOW SEA

황해 黄海

IN CINEMAS NATIONWIDE FROM OCTOBER 21ST

A NA HONG-JIN FILM HA JUNG-WOO KIM YUN-SEOK AND CHO SEONG-HA
WELLMAD, STARM and POPCORN FILM PRESENT IN ASSOCIATION WITH SHOWBOX/MEDIAPLEX AND FOX INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTIONS A POPCORN FILM PRODUCTION
WORLD SALES BY SHOWBOX/MEDIAPLEX REALIZED WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF SEOUL METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT AND SEOUL FILM COMMISSION SUPPORTED BY LOCATION INCENTIVE
PROGRAM OF BUSAN FILM COMMISSION KOREA TRADE INSURANCE CORPORATION AND HAE MUSIC BY JANG YOUNG-GYU AND LEE BYUNG-HOON SOUND BY LIVETONE EDITED BY KIM SUN
PRODUCTION DESIGN BY LEE HWO-KYOUNG COSTUME DESIGN BY CHAE KYUNG-HWA CHOREOGRAPHY BY YOO SANG-SEOB EDITING BY HWANG SOON-WUK RECORDING BY JO WOO-JIN
VISUAL EFFECT BY CHEONG JAI-HOON MAKE-UP BY YANG YUN-YOUNG DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY LEE SUNG-JE PRODUCER HAN SUNG-GOO LINE PRODUCER CHUNG DAE-HOON
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BYUN JONG-EUN AND YOO JUNG-HOON SCREENPLAY AND DIRECTED BY NA HONG-JIN

HAF wellmade SHOWBOX FOX BOUNTY

REAL ENIGMAS

Nick Bradshaw rounds up the festival's documentary contingent, including a trio of formally inventive British films that blur the boundaries of the form

If a good film festival offers a snapshot of the state of the art, this year's BFI London Film Festival finds documentary continuing to test the bounds of its own possibilities – elaborating its means in the cause of documenting different realities, be they outlandish, reticent, or simply the enigmas of memory or madness. Some experiment with elaborate staging, re-enactment and animation – ostensibly the furthest remove from the world of recorded spontaneity for which so many documentarists strive.

Intriguingly, even the masters of worldly portraiture with new films in the festival have been drawn to subjects that foreground the art and nature of performance. Michael Glawogger's *Whores' Glory* is a triptych of studies of prostitutes in Thailand, Bangladesh and Mexico, while Fred Wiseman's *Crazy Horse* spends two hours back-and-forth-stage at the Paris nude cabaret of the same name. James Benning's *Twenty Cigarettes*, meanwhile, marks another shift away from his American landscape films (following last year's HD-video project *Ruhr*), consisting of 20 sequence-length close-ups of friends' faces as they each smoke a solitary cigarette. The structuralist filmmaker's well-honed directorial minimalism may be in order (he hid himself for the duration of each shot), but that can only distil the subjects' own relationships with the camera.

Elsewhere there's the usual clutch of experiential, *vérité* character studies: Jonathan Demme's *I'm Carolyn Parker*, six years in the documenting of a New Orleans native's travails post-Hurricane Katrina; Tristan Patterson's tersely committed SXSW winner *Dragonslayer*, which holds tight (courtesy of a digital SLR camera) with young and weary saddle-tramp skater Josh 'Skreech' Sandoval. Among the investigative forays, Werner Herzog's Texas Death Row sally *Into the Abyss: A Tale of Death, A Tale of Life* and Nick Broomfield and Joan

Churchill's self-explanatory *Sarah Palin – You Betcha!* are likely to provide all the authorial presence you could want.

The Anglo-American contingent also includes *Superheroes*, which profiles various real American would-be superheroes, and *Darwin*, a portrait of a dead-end Death Valley former mining town that sounds oddly like this year's Tribeca and Sheffield Doc/Fest hit *Bombay Beach*. *Better This World*, meanwhile, is an investigation of a heavy-handed FBI bust on idealistic/idiotic young 'domestic terrorists' that definitely is a lot like Marshall Curry's Sundance hit *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front*, right down to the turncoat activist.

"These were our home movies. Then my dog peed on them. I thought it looked cool," narrates film experimenter Pip Chodorov at the beginning of his jaunty personal compendium **Free Radicals: A History of Experimental Film**. Chodorov benefits from having had a father who gathered experimental film artists to the family bosom and attempted to profile them on American TV. "It was the 60s. Peace, love, rock 'n' roll... and experimental home movies," he spiels – which is another way of saying that the weight of that great undead decade increasingly seems to be symbolised by its barely digested mass of self-imagery.

Two further festival titles represent contemporary attempts to mine that archive. Göran Olsson's *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* (our Film of the Month, see p.50) exhumes potent imagery recorded by Swedish television reporters of the second stage of America's civil-rights struggle. Sunnier – and whiter – is Alison Ellwood and Alex Gibney's *Magic Trip*, a virtuoso edit of the copious rushes from Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters' 1964 'magic bus' trip across America (already the subject of a classic non-fiction novel, Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*) that's manna for 60s junkies. Kesey and co. spent years trying to edit some sense into their recordings – silent 16mm



VOICES OF THE LOST British documentaries 'Dreams of a Life', above, 'The Somnambulists', right top, and 'Shock Head Soul', far right, use a range of stylistic approaches to fathom the depths of individual experience

film and separate, non-synch soundtracks (including some retrospective musings on those rushes) – before finally shelving the project.

But while the filmmakers (speaking through the voice of Stanley Tucci) highlight the lack of synch sound as a creative problem, it actually lends this potentially cliquish road movie an imaginative space that it would otherwise have sorely lacked. It's notable that the most entertaining stretch of the film is a sidetrack into a dextrously animated fantasia illustrating tape recordings of an earlier LSD trip Kesey took in an FBI lab as part of a government-sponsored experiment. Between echoes of Terry Gilliam's animation and Gibney's earlier 60s escapade *Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr Hunter S. Thompson*, the film plays something like a prelapsarian *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, but without the danger.

Elusively private

But what of those pasts that draw a blank in the archive – and in the collective memory bank? Carol Morley's unnerving tragedy *Dreams of a Life* sleuths the case of Joyce Carol Vincent, a popular woman who – in 2003, aged 38 – died in her flat overlooking Wood Green Shopping City, with the TV on. Her body was only discovered three years later. How could this happen? Where were her friends, neighbours, the council, etc? In passing, Morley's film paints an unflattering picture of broken civic ties – her camera repeatedly pans from the shopping centre's neon lodestar to the unloved single-storey flat beside it – but the riddle wrapped in the mystery is Joyce herself, a friendly, sexy but elusively private chameleon of a woman who was the acme of an atomised individual.



Morley advertised to find many of her interviewees – Joyce's former friends, boyfriends and colleagues – and converses with them across the camera, often telling them her own investigative findings as well as receiving their testimonies. If you want documentary spontaneity, it's certainly here. (The talking heads are also edited with a beautiful rhythm.) But Morley also directs eerie re-enactments, both of the eventual discovery of Joyce's body in her (real?) cobwebbed flat and, more imaginatively, of scenes from her life using a child and an adult actor – surrogates for a cipher. Their images perceptually fill the vacancy in our comprehension of Joyce's life; they're seductive like fiction, but though we may resist, that leaves us back facing the void of a life that slipped through people's fingers.

There's something similar going on in Richard Jobson's *The Somnambulists*, although here the talking heads and the performed re-enactments are one and the same. The film assembles 15 testimonies from soldiers and medics who served in Iraq, given dramatised readings – the words sound well-edited to me too – by performers whose heads are shot floating free against a black backdrop. (Jobson took both his visual inspiration and his title from a photography exhibition by Joanna Kane.) It's a more minimalist interview film than *Dreams of a Life*, but more expressionist too: the milieu and mindsets of occupying service are evoked through zooms, overlapping exposures, Foley sound effects and sudden shifts of editing tempo and attack, not to mention the spectrality of the disembodied heads. Jobson also paints some computer-generated animation of golden flames on to his speakers' eyeballs, and separates the testimonies with evanescent evocations of families back home, the performers offering inquiring looks at – or through – the camera.

Is this documentary? There's an ambiguity of means and ends that puts the film on the cusp



In 'Shock Head Soul' Simon Pummell pulls out all the stops to probe the case of sometime psychotic Daniel Paul Schreber

between fact and polemic. On the one hand, the addresses to camera and those intervening looks (accusing? beseeching?) – not to mention the quotation of Tony Blair's recent deposition to the Iraq war inquiry – all strike a political and moral challenge; on the other, the experiences and attitudes expressed by the 15 storytellers are the more potent for their diversity and descriptiveness.

Last but not least there's *Shock Head Soul*, in which Simon Pummell (*Body Song*) pulls out all the stops to probe the case of Daniel Paul Schreber, the judge and sometime psychotic whose 1903 *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* were researched and fêted by Freud and Jung. Schreber fought and won an appeal against his first incarceration in an asylum; as Ian Christie, one of several expert psychiatric or cultural witnesses deployed in the

film, notes, his self-diagnosis "holds an important place in the modernising of madness", marking the beginnings of our attempts to comprehend rather than isolate psychosis.

Pummell's film – part of a transmedia project that will include a gallery installation, website and book – undertakes the same by means of art. With its elegant costume re-enactments (featuring Hugo Koolschijn and Annie Pfeifer as Daniel and his younger wife Sabine), *Shock Head Soul* shades close to period biopic – a more obvious approach to the material, you might think. But it also features – also in costume, and indeed on courtroom location – the aforementioned present-day academic interviewees, who at various times expound either directly to camera or, resurrecting the fourth wall, across time to Sabine. ("Is it my fault he's like this?" she wails.) There's also computer-generated animation of Schreber's imagined/hallucinated "Writing Down Machine" – a pulsing, spherical, steam-punk typewriter *avant la lettre* somewhat reminiscent of the organic typewriters in *Naked Lunch* – and onscreen specimens of lines of Schreber's text, complete with animated emendations. Perhaps the multiple dimensions and angular editing strategy evoke Schreber's schizophrenia. What's certain is that, so far as fabricating the inner realities of a long-dead madman goes, Pummell's film does an unparalleled job of documenting the unphotographable.

MAKING THE CUT

The documentaries 'Magic Trip', below, and 'Free Radicals: A History of Experimental Film', above left, both deftly rework received footage



■ For screening times of all the above films at the BFI London Film Festival, see www.bfi.org.uk/lff

THREE LIVES

A late-night exchange of emails inspired 'Dreileben', a unique collaboration between three German directors. By Isabel Stevens

MY problem with the 'Berlin School' [was], after the first remarkable results, I was disappointed... Instead of expanding narrative possibilities, the danger was more of a narrowing gaze." So wrote German television director Dominik Graf on 15 August 2006 in a candid email critique addressed to Christian Petzold and Christoph Hochhäusler, two key filmmakers of the so-called 'Berlin School'. (The label, originally applied to Petzold, Thomas Arslan and Angela Schanelec in 2001, has since widened to encompass a second generation of filmmakers, Hochhäusler among them, many of whom never even attended Berlin's famous Film and Television Academy.) Graf's comments met with little surprise. A director whose genre-roving 50-plus-film career encompasses police thrillers, horror, comedy and melodrama, he has a very different ethos to the likes of Petzold, whose films such as *Wolfsburg* (2003) and *Yella* (2007) are characterised by their lack of dialogue and narrative as well as their slow, patient camerawork.

Four hours after Graf's initial email, at 2.55am,

Hochhäusler fired back: "The Berlin School is basically an invention by observers. Internally there are all kinds of cross-currents with no interest at all in nailing down characteristics/deficits." His next sentence was pivotal to what followed: "I would greatly welcome a controversial discussion." The result was an impassioned summer-long email marathon between the three directors (later published in the German magazine *Revolver*).

The Berlin School provided the initial focus of the exchange, but soon the conversation drifted on to other terrain, with Graf voicing his concerns over the strict separation between commercial films made for mainstream audiences and those that live largely on the festival circuit – that may gather critical praise, but are never widely seen. And the exchange didn't stop with words. Out of it emerged the idea of a collaborative film project that would play with narrative perspective and genre expectations, but would refuse to be pigeon-holed as an experimental curio for festival audiences, given that its funding (as with many of the most adventurous long-form projects at the moment) would come from television.

Dreileben – a trio of linked films independently directed by each of the three filmmakers – premiered in Berlin to surprisingly muted acclaim, but has since been gathering attention at festivals, including Locarno, where I saw it in August. (It airs on German television this autumn.) Centring on a single premise – a convicted serial killer on the run near a fictional town in the middle of the Thuringian forest – it's undoubtedly one of the most ambitious and exciting cinematic events of the year. While the films work on their own, they are best viewed as a triptych; together, they offer a splintered, interlinking narrative with characters casually appearing from film to film, but without that gratuitous Inárritu-style sense of interconnectivity. The Belgian director Lucas Belvaux may have tried something not dissimilar with his 2002 trilogy *One, Two and Three*, but *Dreileben* comes across less as a puzzle to be pieced together than as a gradually unravelling tapestry.

As its title (literally translated as 'three lives') suggests, each director filters their story through a different viewpoint: Graf from the perspective of a police psychologist and Hochhäusler through the eyes of the killer himself, while Petzold's opening film focuses on a summer romance. As Graf puts it, "We constructed something together: a situation, an atmosphere, a place – and then deconstructed it again." For most of Petzold's decidedly Hitchcockian *Beats Being Dead* (*Etwas besseres*

THREE DIMENSIONS

Left to right: Christian Petzold's 'Beats Being Dead', Dominik Graf's 'Don't Follow Me Around' and Christoph Hochhäusler's 'One Minute of Darkness'

als den Tod), the manhunt is just a matter of sirens in the background, which along with a swirling score inscribe a mood of encircling menace on to the central stop-start teenage romance between a wealthy student and a Bosnian chambermaid. Theirs is a summer affair that twists and turns in the most unexpected ways, but while Petzold's detached, clinical style is unmistakably present in the film's murky palette of greys and greens, just take a look at his expert use of Julie London's 'Cry Me a River' for proof that his heart isn't cold.

Similarly, in *Don't Follow Me Around* (*Komm mir nicht nach*), Graf uses the police hunt as a backdrop that seeps a sinister mood into his real narrative focus – the relationship between psychologist Johanna and her old university friend Vera, reacquainted when the former visits the town to help track down the killer and investigate reports of police corruption. Stylistically, as you'd expect, it's the trilogy's anomaly, with Graf's talkative scenes pointedly combating the conversation-light films

Each director filters their story through a different viewpoint

of Petzold and Hochhäusler. Whereas in Berlin School films, according to Graf, language is treated as "an instrument of horror and torture", here dialogue is reinstated to what he feels is its rightful place at "the warm centre of a film" during the tipsy reminiscence scenes where Vera and Johanna discover they used to share the same boyfriend.

With its subjective gaze and roving camera – a stark contrast to the director's normal objective stance and static compositions – Hochhäusler's final segment *One Minute of Darkness* (*Eine Minute dunkel*) reveals him as the one who's perhaps most willing to take risks. Focusing squarely on the crime and the criminal, Hochhäusler may provide *Dreileben* with its obvious genre joys (including one fantastic bridge chase sequence), but the overarching mood is contemplative rather than arrestingly tense. Out of the previously little-seen character of the serial killer, Hochhäusler carves a mentally ill Frankenstein's Monster figure, utterly consumed by the forest, which here becomes a mystical entity full of foreboding. His film provides a spectacular and ominous finale to a remarkable trilogy that defiantly refuses to tie up any narrative threads in its quest to conquer both the big and small screens.

■ The three 'Dreileben' films screen at the BFI London Film Festival from 15 to 19 October



MADE IN TIBET

*For the first time in 60 years, Tibetan culture can speak directly to the outside world via two films at the LFF, says **Tony Rayns***

It was a slightly bumpy ride this year, choosing East Asian films to recommend to LFF artistic director Sandra Hebron for her final festival. Several prime titles were snatched away by their producers or sales agents because festivals coming up in early 2012 were demanding the European premieres. I particularly regret losing the first underground feature from Burma (*Return to Burma*, by a director who calls himself Midi Z), which combines some sophisticated reflections on good governance with a convincing evocation of grass-roots life in the countryside. By way of compensation, though, the LFF is screening two new features from Tibet which, taken together, suggest that the rise of an ethnically Tibetan cinema may be the hottest development in Chinese cinema as a whole since the surge in independent filmmaking in the 1990s.

The prime mover – actually, the only begetter – of real Tibetan cinema is Pema Tsenden, formerly known by his Chinese name Wanma Caidan. He was born in a village on the Qingzang Altiplano, 3000 metres above sea level, in 1969. He studied Tibetan language and culture at university before furthering his interest in film. I'm not sure if he was the first Tibetan to graduate from Beijing Film Academy (there certainly haven't been many), but he was definitely the first ethnic Tibetan to shoot films in Tibet. Earlier films shot on the Tibetan plateau sometimes brought out the best in their



Han Chinese directors: Li Jun's politically tendentious *Serfs* (*Nongnu*, 1964) is the only Chinese movie in the operatic vein of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, and Tian Zhuangzhuang's *Horse Thief* (*Daoma Zei*, 1986) treats the mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism with great respect. But there had never been an actual Tibetan voice in Chinese cinema.

Ironically, Pema Tsenden's graduation short *The Grassland* (2004) starts out looking – and more particularly sounding – like the kind of folksy 'ethnic minority movie' the Chinese studios churned out in the communist days. But as its mini-drama asserts itself (it's about identifying who stole a sacred yak), the folksiness gives way to a Buddhist perspective on conflict resolution: more original and more distinctive. And there's no folksiness at all in his debut feature *The Silent Holy Stones* (*Lhing Vjags Kyi Ma ni Rdo Vbum*, 2005), which he shot in his own home village. Virtually plotless, it's about a trainee lama who's delighted to be allowed home from the temple for the New Year holiday. A vague sense that a Kiarostami-like sensibility was shaping the formalised observational style and guiding the non-pro cast was confirmed by Pema Tsenden's follow-up *The Search* (*Atshol*, 2009), which borrows concepts from *Through the Olive Trees* to show a director's quest for talents to perform a traditional Tibetan opera.

The two films in the LFF are Pema Tsenden's latest, *Old Dog* (*Khyi Rgan*, 2010), and the debut feature by his DP Sonthar Gyal, *The Sun-Beaten Path* (*Dbus Lam Gyi Nyima*, 2011). Both are strikingly good. *Old Dog* is less about the Nomad Mastiff of the title than about its owners, the hard-drinking Gonpo, his childless wife and his implacably grumpy father – or rather, about the widening chasms between them, into which the dog falls. A certain amount of backstory emerges from conversations, especially those with the cousin who's a cop in the nearest town, but the director is already skilled enough to let the casting and the imagery do most of the 'talking'; the film achieves an



GRASS ROOTS
In 'Old Dog', above, Pema Tsenden continues to pioneer Tibetan cinema, while 'The Sun-Beaten Path', top, marks the directing debut of his DP

almost Bressonian intimacy with the characters, without needing much in the way of plot.

The Sun-Beaten Path is a kind of road movie, interspersed with flashbacks. The protagonist, a screwed-up young man called Nyima, is returning home from a pilgrimage to Lhasa which has clearly failed to relieve the burden of guilt he carries. He gets off the bus to walk instead, and persistently shuns offers of help from a kindly old stranger, who perseveres with him regardless. We soon find out what's bugging Nyima: he accidentally killed his mother when he overturned a farm vehicle. Road movies are traditionally about personal growth, but Nyima is stuck in his trauma, determined to punish – maybe even to destroy – himself. Sonthar Gyal gives the character no easy way out, but the film is not locked into Nyima's consciousness. Its idiom is what you might call spiritual realism, and it effortlessly frames his difficulties within a larger picture of what's changing in Tibet – and what will never change.

There's no politics in these films (the Film Bureau in Beijing would jump on both directors if they dropped the least hint of criticism of China's rule in Tibet), but you could argue that their very Tibetan-ness has a political meaning. For the first time in 60 years, Tibetan culture is speaking directly to the outside world.

The rise of an ethnically Tibetan cinema is the hottest development in Chinese film

■ 'Old Dog' screens at the BFI London Film Festival on 19 & 20 October; 'The Sun-Beaten Path' screens on 22 & 25 October

TOP 20

From London to Hong Kong, from Anatolia to Adelaide, this is our selection of 20 films not to miss at this year's festival. For in-depth reviews of LFF titles, see our website at www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound



The Deep Blue Sea

Terence Davies

Romantic love as agony for adulteress Rachel Weisz in ration-book post-war London



The Kid with a Bike

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne

Cyril's dad doesn't want him. Will he take help from a stranger? A heart-wrenching, elegant film gem



Sleeping Sickness

Ulrich Köhler

A German doctor in Cameroon, due to leave with his family, can't let go of his African reverie



The Descendants

Alexander Payne

Superbly crafted tragi-comedy about Hawaiian widower Clooney reconnecting with his kids



Martha Marcy May Marlene

Sean Durkin

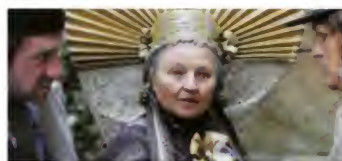
Martha flees a rural cult to recover at her sister's lakeside home in this Haneke-like study of the sinister



Snowtown

Justin Kurzel

This real-life case of local bigotry feeding ultra-violence features stunning lead Daniel Henshall



Faust

Aleksandr Sokurov

A flawlessly executed, riveting conclusion to Sokurov's tetralogy on power and its corruptions



Miss Bala

Gerardo Naranjo

A beauty queen becomes passive witness to lethal Mexican drug-gang life in this searing thriller



Take Shelter

Jeff Nichols

Michael Shannon is at his neurotic best as an ordinary Joe who starts having apocalyptic nightmares



The First Born

Miles Mander

Gorgeously restored Alma Reville-scripted silent melodrama about upper-class double standards



Once upon a Time in Anatolia

Nuri Bilge Ceylan

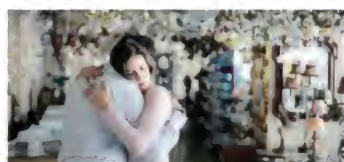
Immensely subtle slow-burn overnight investigation into a self-confessed crime of passion



Target

Alexander Zeldovich

A striking dystopian Russian sci-fi that compares favourably with the greats of the genre



Alps

Yorgos Lanthimos

Another twisted, darkly humorous study of group dynamics from the director of *Dogtooth*



Hors Satan

Bruno Dumont

Cogent parable of being beyond good and evil, focused on a local drifter and his teenage girl follower



Shame

Steve McQueen

Michael Fassbender's NY sex addict has his fragile sister to stay in this portrait of modern dysfunction



This Must Be the Place

Paolo Sorrentino

Robert Smith-like recluse rock star Sean Penn hits the road in search of the past after his father's death



The Artist

Michel Hazanavicius

Brilliantly inventive pastiche of Hollywood's silent days and skit on the *A Star Is Born* theme



I Wish

Kore-eda Hirokazu

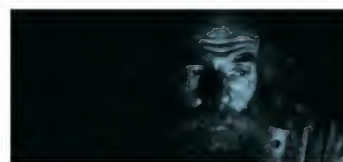
Simply one of the best-observed films about children you will ever see, from a true master



A Simple Life

Ann Hui

A graceful and moving depiction of the relationship between a young man and a family servant



Two Years at Sea

Ben Rivers

A haunting portrait of the solitary life captured in ravishing black-and-white images

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- Two video pieces with Douglas Trumbull [36:00]
- *A Conversation with Bruce Dern* [11:00]
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COMPETITIONS

THE TREE OF LIFE: Five copies of Terrence Malick film to be won on Blu-ray or DVD

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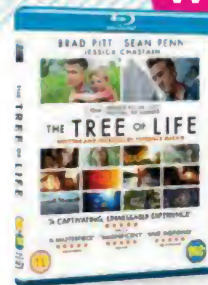
Terrence Malick's hugely anticipated film released earlier this year now makes its way to Blu-ray and DVD courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment. Telling the impressionistic story of a 1950s family in Texas, the film follows the life journey of the eldest son, Jack, through the

innocence of childhood to his disillusioned adult years. Malick weaves together a beautifully shot film that follows the origins of creation and questions the meaning of life. The Blu-ray edition also features a documentary, *Exploring the Tree of Life*. We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and state if you prefer a Blu-ray or DVD edition:

Q. Which one of these actors did NOT appear in Malick's 'The Thin Red Line'?

- a. Adrien Brody
- b. Matt Damon
- c. John C. Reilly



DREW STRUZAN: OEUVRE

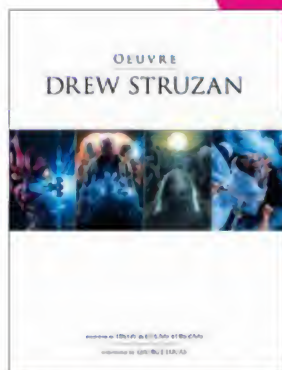
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Drew Struzan has produced some of the most iconic artwork for modern movies, with over 150 film posters to his credit including *Star Wars*, *Back to the Future*, *Harry Potter*, *Indiana Jones*, *E.T.* and *Hellboy*. This colourful hardback edition by Titan Books includes an introduction by George Lucas and some 250 pieces of Struzan's art, featuring the most iconic movie images, as well as other highlights of his career, from album, book and comic-book covers to stamps, trading cards and original works, plus some never-before-published personal works. We have three copies to give away.

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Q. For which US television series did Drew Struzan create poster artwork?

- a. Heroes
- b. Lost
- c. The Walking Dead



WIN

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BFI DVD celebrate Kurosawa Akira with a body of the great director's work packaged into two themed collections. The *Kurosawa Crime Collection* brings together four of his finest thrillers: the yakuza gangster drama *Drunken Angel*, police thriller *Stray Dog*, *The Bad Sleep Well* – a tale of corporate greed and corruption, and the gripping *High and Low*. The *Kurosawa Classic Collection* features five films exploring the many complexities of life. Included here are the beautifully nuanced *Ikiru*, *I Live in Fear*, *Red Beard* and Kurosawa's first colour film *Dodes'ka-den*. Newly written essays accompany the sets. We have two pairs to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Which Maxim Gorky play did Kurosawa adapt into a 1957 film?

- a. The Lower Depths
- b. Enemies
- c. Children of the Sun



CINEMA: THE WHOLE STORY: Five books to be won

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Film critic Philip Kemp takes a close look at the key time periods, genres and films in world cinema in *Cinema: The Whole Story* (published by Thames & Hudson). The book is organised chronologically, as Kemp and other film experts trace the evolution of cinema, from the earliest days of

film projection to the multi-screen cinemas and super-technology of today. Illustrated with over 1,100 colour images, and featuring time-lines of key events, this is an accessible read for all those who love watching and reading about world cinema. We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. What film did Francis Ford Coppola make in between 'The Godfather' and 'The Godfather Part II'?

- a. The Conversation
- b. Apocalypse Now
- c. The Rain People



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Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'The Tree of Life DVDs', 'Kurosawa Akira Collections', 'Drew Struzan books' or 'Cinema: The Whole Story books' in the subject heading, to: s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk. Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'The Tree of Life DVD competition', 'Kurosawa Akira Collection competition', 'Drew Struzan books competition' or 'Cinema: the Whole Story book competition'; Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

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CLASH OF THE WONDERLANDS



Two years on from 'Avatar', audience fatigue and critical scepticism may be peaking just as genuinely adventurous 3D work is coming our way. Don't write off the format yet, says **Ian Christie**, as he examines 3D from a historical perspective

Will the cinema of the future be stereoscopic? Will tomorrow follow today?" Guess who wrote that, and when? James Cameron? Jeffrey Katzenberg, taking DreamWorks into full 3D? Any CEO of a cinema chain that's been benefiting from the premium box-office delivered by 3D films since *Avatar* launched in December 2009? Nope, it was Sergei Eisenstein, writing shortly before his early death in 1948.

For many who believe that the current hyper-promotion of 3D is little more than a cynical ploy to regain the youth audience for cinema with a new gimmick, or to promote a piracy-proof format, Eisenstein's enthusiasm may come as a surprise. What gave him such confidence in this new technology, only four years after he had managed to make a film in colour for the first time? Ostensibly, it was the premiere of *Robinson Crusoe*, the first glasses-free stereoscopic dramatic feature in colour by Russian pioneer Semyon Ivanov, which took place in Moscow in February 1947. But Eisenstein had less to say about Ivanov's film than he did about stereoscopic film as the culmination of all that cinema – and the history of theatre – have been aiming for over millennia.

Breaking down the barrier between audience and performance, according to Eisenstein, has been the main goal of all great forms of theatre, from the amphitheatres of Ancient Greece to the baroque theatre of the court masques and the Japanese kabuki, right up to the revolutionary

Soviet theatre that he'd been a part of in his youth. But his argument wasn't only based on theatre; a rapid survey of trends in 1940s cinema, including such films as Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) and Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), pointed to filmmakers aiming to implicate the spectator by composition in depth and a battery of point-of-view devices.

Stereo cinema, surely, is what they're all reaching out for? Only Western reactionaries, Eisenstein claimed, would want to argue against it – reminding us that his article was written during the first spike of what would soon become the ideological Cold War, and before the first wave of 3D films in the early 1950s that culminated in Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* (1954).

But if we leave aside the Soviet triumphalism, it's easy to map on to Eisenstein's early defence of 3D the tide of critical scepticism and outright hostility to the format that we've seen over the last two years. Probably the most influential voices in this have been the editor Walter Murch and the critic Roger Ebert, whose January 2011 blog post 'Why 3D Doesn't Work and Never Will' has become a frequent reference-point for opponents.

It wasn't *Avatar* that roused Ebert's ire, but one of the host of 'faked' 3D films that followed in its wake – Michel Gondry's *The Green Hornet*. 'Faked' refers to the process of creating a 3D effect in post-production with material that has been shot in normal 2D – a process undertaken with gusto by many major Hollywood studios once the bonanza of higher ticket prices and overall revenues from 3D was spotted.

For *Avatar*, James Cameron had unquestionably conceived a *mise en scène* that plays on the revelation of a 'new world' – the planet of Pandora – that his protagonist enters through a form of virtual reality. And this functions for the audience as, literally, an entry into the perceptual possibilities offered by Cameron's use of advanced stereoscopic compositing. Self-referentially, it becomes an allegory of liberation for the paraplegic ex-marine Jake (Sam Worthington) as he enters his Na'vi avatar, and for us as we enter the new world of RealD – whether or not we buy the film's larger identification with the fight against a rapacious invading imperialism.

Notoriously, many critics did not buy it, proving themselves significantly out of step with much audience reaction, although it should be said – in view of his role in challenging 3D – that Ebert was not one of these. His review was one of the most enthusiastic by an established and influential critic, hailing the film as "sensational entertainment" and a "technical breakthrough" with a "flat-out Green and anti-war message". He also praised Cameron's restrained deployment of 3D, never used to "promiscuously violate the fourth wall".

Interestingly, a new in-depth report for the BFI on what the British public feels about film, 'Opening Our Eyes', echoes Ebert's response. Asked to nominate one film that was significant for them, 42 respondents from the sample of over 2,000 chose *Avatar*, released over a year earlier. (The most frequent choice, with 100 mentions, was *The King's Speech* – at the height of its fame when the survey took place in late February 2011 – followed by *Schindler's List*, with 75.)

What's particularly interesting about the survey respondents who chose *Avatar* is their wide age range, with people in their forties and fifties commenting on the film taking "animation to a whole new level" and 3D intensifying emotional engagement. A recent experiment carried out in Bristol that compared the relative level of 'presence' experienced by viewers of the film in 3D and in 2D reported, perhaps unsurprisingly, that 3D mostly delivered greater immersion. The point is that *Avatar* doesn't depend entirely on its 3D artifice for its sensory – and indeed aesthetic – impact, but that these are considerably enhanced by Cameron's wholehearted commitment to – and invention of – a stereoscopic world.

Sustaining the illusion

Sadly, and I think damagingly, many of the 3D films that have followed *Avatar* were not conceived by true believers. Indeed there are reports of sceptical, and certainly unprepared, filmmakers whose efforts were enhanced by the new breed of on-set stereographers, or merely tweaked in post-production to create the commercial proposition of X, Y and Z 'in 3D', while this was proving such a sensational box-office draw during



BRAVE NEW WORLD

Unlike so many 'faked' 3D releases, Scorsese's 'Hugo', above, and Spielberg's 'The Adventures of Tintin', left, were conceived with the format in mind

2010 and early 2011. The box-office results from Burton's thinly imagined *Alice in Wonderland* and even the execrable *Clash of the Titans* – a true example of 'applied' 3D – may have been impressive, but these can have done little to convince the doubting that 3D had a real future as a new filmic language. By contrast, more modest UK 'native 3D' productions, such as *StreetDance* and the motor-cycle race documentary *TT3D*, were more promising in this respect.

But the cost of planning and shooting in native 3D remains considerable. An even greater obstacle may be the lack of enthusiasm among established filmmakers. I was surprised when interviewing the Russian director Andrei Konchalovsky – who has made a major feature in 3D, *The Nutcracker* – that he vowed never to work in the format again, citing Ebert's verdict, and the supposedly validating argument by Walter Murch that Ebert has put into circulation.

Murch is the highly respected sound and picture editor, best known for his work with Francis Ford Coppola on *The Conversation* and *Apocalypse Now*, but also considered by many a sage theorist of the medium. In a letter quoted by Ebert, Murch argued that even if the widely admitted problem of 3D projection making the image seem dim could be solved, there remains something more fundamentally wrong with the 3D illusion. Since it requires our eyes to converge and focus at different points,

we have to "work at" sustaining the illusion. This means, Murch argued, that "the 'CPU' [central processing unit] of our perceptual brain has to work extra hard", resulting in the headaches that some viewers report. And for Murch it's a "deep problem" that "600 million years of evolution never prepared [us] for".

Such technical talk about the mechanics of perception has undoubtedly impressed many. But the evolutionary biology that Murch invokes cannot be used to prove our inability to adapt to new perceptual demands. Binocular vision, as distinct from the independent, sideways-facing eyes of other animal groups, may well have developed in primates to aid their search for prey. Since that distant era, human binocular vision has adapted to vastly different conditions, including modern, increasingly screen-based life. And it is considerably more complex at a neural level than Murch implies.

This is not to deny that a number of viewers of 3D films report headaches, and a significant minority do indeed lack the ability to 'see' this illusion, in the same way that between 7 and 10 per cent of the total population have the deficit popularly known as 'colour blindness'. But Murch is claiming that 3D is physiologically 'against nature', which I suspect is highly dubious on scientific grounds. The more we know about the intricate neural processing that supports our vision, the more we realise that it's highly adaptable to new challenges and goals. Like those who once doubted, sincerely, that man was meant to travel as fast as the early railways could carry

Having “loved” *Avatar*, Bertolucci wondered why 3D should only be considered good for fantasy and sci-fi



him, claims that 3D isn't natural may come to look rather quaint.

However, what's undoubtedly true is that poorly conceived and presented 3D can cause what vision researchers distinguish as 'visual discomfort' and 'fatigue', the one a subjective (although genuine) reaction, the other a measurable impact that has implications for those who use stereo visualisation in technical fields. These are due to the basic illusory mechanism that permits stereo displays, which is an uncoupling of the eyes' normal 'vergence' (or rotation) to deal with objects near and far, and the matching 'accommodation' reflex – factors that were investigated as long ago as the 1890s by one of the pioneers of vision research, A.S. Percival. In fact the amount of dissociation the eyes can tolerate is still known as Percival's 'zone of comfort', and this is what 3D has to work around.

Murch is right to say that the discomfort reported by some viewers would disappear if we had holographic displays, which must be the ultimate goal for 3D. Certainly no one enjoys having to wear the current generation of glasses. But on the scientific front, there is a considerable body of research – much of it driven by the development of 3D television systems – that shows convincingly that well-managed stereo doesn't cause fatigue or eye strain, except for a minority of viewers who may never enjoy the effect (rather like those, including me, who know that whirling fairground rides are not for them).

But would we want everything in 3D, as Katzenberg has pledged for DreamWorks output? Does it have to be all or nothing, as some are urging – on

AN EXTRA DIMENSION

Clockwise from top left: Werner Herzog's 'Cave of Forgotten Dreams'; 'Dial M for Murder'; 'Avatar' and 'Pina' show the genuine scope 3D offers filmmakers

both sides? Or can it become a significant and permanent part of our audiovisual culture? Here's where a historical perspective may be useful. What cinema has taken on board during the last hundred years has not represented a single line of 'progress', from flickering 'animated photographs' to the latest in seamless CGI. Rather, it has been a slow process of realising what the pioneers already envisaged, with much resistance from purists along the way.

The invention of sound recording preceded moving pictures by at least 15 years, and the Stereoscope was even earlier, offering an enhanced 3D vision of the world to millions of Victorians in what was the first great 'optical entertainment' craze of the mid-19th century. Louis Lumière, creator of the Cinématographe, always believed that moving pictures should be available stereoscopically and in colour, and he continued working on this until the 1930s, when he finally produced a range of demonstration pieces. During 2010, the Lumière Institute in Lyon began showing these digitally, with a spectacular projection in Bologna's Piazza Grande during last year's Cinema Ritrovato festival.

For most of the 20th century, stereoscopy remained a domestic entertainment through popular gadgets like the Viewmaster. Despite regular bursts of big-screen activity, like the wave of the late 1940s that so encouraged Eisenstein,

creative filmmakers have scarcely had a chance to explore its potential in different modes (although it's surely significant that Hitchcock chose not an open-air subject but the claustrophobic, domestic murder thriller *Dial M for Murder* for his one experiment in the format).

What has influenced many who hated, or more often simply avoided, *Avatar* was the near-simultaneous arrival on UK screens earlier this year of two 3D documentaries: Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* and Wim Wenders's *Pina*. In both cases there is an interesting thematic link between the format and the film's subject. Herzog takes us on a Jules Verne-like exploration of a lost world of prehistoric image-making, with 3D enabling us to 'be there'; and Wenders uses the spatial illusionism of stereoscopy more fluently than Klaus Obermaier was able to in his 2007 experiment in 3D dance *The Rite of Spring*, recently seen in Birmingham and London. Few could doubt that 3D enhances Pina Bausch's witty choreography. One future for 3D, now that the apparatus is widely available, must be for such innovative special attractions, and of course for a wide range of documentary subjects, especially in natural history.

But has it a future in dramatic film, other than for spectacle? One of the most encouraging recent pronouncements was Bernardo Bertolucci's, on the occasion of his honorary Palme d'Or in Cannes this year. Having seen and “loved” *Avatar*, Bertolucci wondered why 3D should only be considered good for fantasy and science fiction. Imagine, he speculated, if Fellini's *8½* or Bergman's *Persona* had been stereoscopic. Imagine indeed! But if all goes well we'll have his first venture, a chamber piece entitled *Io te (Me and You)*, to reveal how 3D can create intimate spaces. And before that, there's the richly varied 3D menu in prospect this autumn of Scorsese's *Hugo*, Spielberg's *The Adventures of Tintin* and, with luck, Coppola's partially 3D *Twixt*.

I mentioned to a Korean film academic that I was writing about 3D, and asked what he thought of it. Back came the response: “It's a capitalist plot, isn't it, to earn more at the box office and sell everyone new TVs?” He's right, of course, though the same could be said for much of 'normal' cinema. 3D suits the audiovisual industry perfectly, especially when the software and hardware branches are linked. No wonder that Howard Stringer has committed Sony to 3D, since it has the potential to unify the company's many interests in one mighty chain of vertical integration.

But whether or not that happens, I want to hold on to Lumière's and Eisenstein's and now Scorsese's vision of what it could be. *Hugo* goes back to the beginnings of movie magic, with the discovery of silent-film pioneer Georges Méliès as an embittered old toy seller in the Gare Montparnasse. For Scorsese, it's been an opportunity to pay tribute to the source of film's intrinsic illusionism, with the novelty of 3D helping to transport modern audiences back to the sense of wonder once inspired by Méliès's films. Will the cinema of tomorrow be stereoscopic – and holographic, and interactive? Why on earth not?

■ *'The Adventures of Tintin'* is released on 26 October; *'Hugo'* is released on 2 December

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'Tyrannosaur', about a reformed alcoholic's relationship with a victim of domestic violence, is the feature-directing debut of actor Paddy Considine. Just don't call it social realism, Considine and his irrepressible lead actor Peter Mullan tell **Nick Bradshaw**

ANGRY BASTARDS

I remember first talking to Ken Loach when we were going to make *My Name Is Joe*, and I was still shooting *Orphans*, which was the first feature I'd ever directed. I asked, 'Have you any tips?' He's going, 'Oh, I would never presume...' And I was like, 'Give me some tips, man, you're a legend!' And he went, 'Well...' And I was hanging on every word, because it was like talking to your teacher, hoping you've done the right thing. And he went, 'Obviously...' – and I'm thinking, 'Oh, please say that I have done this.' And he said, 'Cut the night shoots.'

"Of course, my jaw dropped. We'd just done three-and-a-half weeks of night shoots. My whole film was set at night! And I was like, 'Why is it bad to do night shoots?' But from an experienced filmmaker's point of view, he was spot on. Ridley Scott wouldn't be doing *Blade Runner* now, no way on earth. The last thing you want to be doing in your late fifties, early sixties is working from five at night to five in the morning. It's brutal."

This is Peter Mullan, writer-director of *Orphans* (1998), *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) and last year's not notably day-lit Glaswegian gang-war drama *Neds*, and actor in everything from *Trainspotting* (1995) to *The Claim* (2000), from *Red Riding* (2009) to Steven Spielberg's upcoming *War Horse*. Sitting opposite is the man who's directed him in *Tyrannosaur*: Paddy Considine, the face of several films by his friend Shane Meadows, as well as those by a roll-call of the best British filmmakers in the dozen years he's been on the scene, including Pawel Pawlikowski (*Last Resort*, *My Summer of Love*), Michael Winterbottom (*24 Hour Party People*), Edgar Wright (*Hot Fuzz*), Paul Greengrass (*The Bourne Ultimatum*), James Marsh (*Red Riding*),

Jamie Thraves (*The Cry of the Owl*) and Richard Ayoade (*Submarine*). How did it work, having a more experienced director in front of the camera than behind it?

"Paddy's a mate," Mullan replies, "but as an actor, I would never open my trap directorially. The only time would be on a practical level, if a director were to ask: 'Is it just me or should this not be happening?' Because when you do your first film, you're never sure you are doing it 'the right way'."

Considine puts it differently. "I don't want to embarrass Peter," he says, "but I wrote this film for him because, next to Jack Nicholson, he's my favourite actor. And I've edited a Peter Mullan performance now – I know his choices, and they're brilliant." Pushed for an example, he cites a scene in which Mullan reacts to a friend's pub story by being asleep. "That might not seem like anything, but it's a choice to not act," Considine adds. "It's like Nicholson in [*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, when you cut to him and he's just putting his fags up his sleeve. Great actors live in the small moments."

In fact Considine and Mullan have worked this arrangement before – along with *Tyrannosaur*'s lead actress Olivia Colman (of *Peep Show* fame) – on the former's 2007 short *Dog Altogether*. Considine's debut feature as writer-director, *Tyrannosaur* picks up and runs with that film's scenario. Mullan revels in another of his trademark prickly-pear roles as Joseph, a semi-reformed drunkard with a smouldering, hair-trigger temper, who commences the film by kicking his beloved dog to death after a perceived betting-shop slight. He meets Colman's Hannah, a charity-shop worker from the better side of the tracks (the film's set on the Seacroft Estate in Leeds) when he takes sanc-

tuary in her shop from a group of lads he's previously terrorised. Though he initially scorns what he deems her Christian sanctimony, he's also drawn back to her; the discovery that she's tormented by her well-heeled but inferior-minded and abusive husband James (Eddie Marsan) kindles a mix of empathy and guilt in Joseph, at the same time as Joseph's appearance spurs James to further violence.

Anyone expecting more of the loose-limbed, larky top notes of some of Considine's signature acting turns will be struck by *Tyrannosaur*'s heart-on-sleeve sincerity; while it has its flashes of dry humour, it conveys a world of hurt and pain. Even the boy across the road lives under the thumb of his mum's yobbish boyfriend and his menacing pitbull. It's a film in which the bad dogs outlive the good.

"I'm still trying to figure out what the film is about," ponders Considine. "But I was interested in this love story between two people from different parts of society, and how they're able to understand each other's pain. I think as a person I'm interested in survival, and the film deals with extremities: everybody has been forced to be something they don't want to be, or put through something they shouldn't have to experience."

"To be honest, I wasn't interested in making a film with regard to any other films. There wasn't any model in mind," he says, switching tack. "All I knew was that I didn't want to overshoot it and get handheld and swing the camera around – all those methods I thought had become a bit of a short-hand for people not knowing what they wanted. It's not social realism, whatever that means, but I think it dares to be quite truthful in its own version



MAN WITH SLEDGEHAMMER
In 'Tyrannosaur', the volatile Joseph (Peter Mullan, both pics) becomes involved with Hannah (Olivia Colman, left); opposite, Mullan on set with director Paddy Considine



of what the truth is, if that makes sense. Oddly, I can't recall any moments of terrible doubt; I just felt a need to write this story and it poured out. I can't explain it any other way than that I felt compelled to write it and make it.

"I don't want to say the film is autobiographical, because to the letter it ain't," he continues. "Are there elements in there of people I know? Yeah. Like any art it's just an exploration – it's my expression, my canvas. I have to believe – and I know, because Peter's one of those filmmakers – that cinema is still a place where artists can hang their work up. I don't know, mate, truthfully..."

"You're making total sense to me, man," growls his star.

Personal perspectives

Mullan himself took a pop at social realism when interviewed about *Neds* in these pages back in February, and his thoughts don't seem to have mellowed in the intervening months. He explains how he's just been watching an unnamed Mexican-set Henry Fonda film (presumably 1947's *The Fugitive*), whose claims to state-of-the-art realism in its day now look risible. He compares *Tyrannosaur* to Lynne Ramsay's impressionist fables, which "grow out of the so-called social-realist tradition", but also acknowledge their maker's personal perspectives.

Warming to his theme, Mullan continues: "If your sole intent is to say, 'This is not in any way, shape or form contrived. This is as things really are,' then a) you are a liar and b) you are artistically and morally bankrupt, in my book. You know, we've got so-called reality TV wall to fucking wall, and how much have we learned about humanity

'If I were ever to work with an actor who got pleasure from inflicting pain on, another actor, then I would break his neck'

in the last ten years through watching that? Nothing. We're dumber now than we were ten years ago, and yet we're being told, 'I'm just putting a camera up and watching people going out partying.' No you're not, you're choosing to follow this person who is a bit more mouthy than that person and you're creating a drama but telling us it's reality. You film us three in this room right now, you put a camera there; the minute you choose to go to Paddy, to me or the chimney, it's a political act. I have no time for those cunts who run around saying, 'I'm just holding a camera up to people as I believe they are.' Fuck off..."

Both Mullan and Considine have a track record of playing characters with, to put it mildly, bees in their bonnets, I point out. Is it fun?

"Angry bastards," Mullan laughs. "As long as you are not really like that, it's brilliant fun – it's the dramatic equivalent of a light-sabre fight. I imagine any actor who did have a serious anger issue would either fuck it up or not even get to the end of the shoot. If you had those kind of issues – if Paddy was really like the guys in *[A Room for] Romeo Brass* or *Dead Man's Shoes*..."

"I'd be fucked," Considine chips in.

"I wouldn't stand in the same fucking room as him, that's for sure."

"*Romeo Brass* was the most fun I've ever had as an actor," says Considine. "It was the first thing I ever did and I was in character all day. I'd make a point

of sitting next to the producers on the bus and telling them all these mad stories as they tried to get away from me, like *[adopts the strangled accent of his character in that film, Morell]* 'I'm thinking about making a film about the army...'"

"I think because you've been given licence – and particularly if you are doing it with a degree of emotional truth – you're providing entertainment by immersing yourself for a couple of minutes into your worst nightmare," Mullan adds. "With impunity, because you're not hurting anyone. I've never come across it, but if I were ever to work with an actor who got pleasure from inflicting pain on, say, another actor, then I would break his neck, because that's when it ceases to be the game."

"Historically we all know Robert Shaw deliberately terrorised Richard Dreyfuss for three quarters of the *Jaws* shoot. I'm sorry, it doesn't show. Dreyfuss just hated him, but in the film he's not allowed to hate him, he's meant to be intimidated but secretly wish he were Shaw – so the games that Robert was playing actually went against the movie. But he terrorised Spielberg too. He used to take him away at nights and tell him stories about what he was going to do to him. It's not going to make the film any better, that kind of shenanigan. Wish I'd been there..."

■ '*Tyrannosaur*' is released on 7 October, and is reviewed on page 75

The top award may have gone to a Russian, but British films made a remarkably strong showing at the Venice Film Festival, from the high-profile 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Shame' to discoveries like 'Two Years at Sea' and 'This Our Still Life'. By **Kieron Corless**

DO LOOK NOW



HIGH AND LOW
Yorgos Lanthimos's 'Alps', above, and Ben Rivers's 'Two Years at Sea', left, both took away prizes, while Andrew Köttling's 'This Our Still Life', right, divided critics



In the end it wasn't the vintage Venice we'd hoped for given the directors lined up, but it wasn't half bad either. If in previous years the Orizzonti section and other sidebars were where you'd go for the real action, and to avoid overhyped competition titles like *Black Swan*, this year the good stuff seemed more evenly spread across the various strands, and so slightly harder to winkle out. Concerns among the cinephilic hardcore at the number of big-name American films proved justified, since many were virtually unwatchable (Todd Solondz's *Dark Horse* especially), but to be fair I'd left before the closing-night screening of Whit Stillman's *Damsels in Distress*, which some said was the best film in the festival. Arriving three days in, I also missed David Cronenberg's *A Dangerous Method*, Chantal Akerman's *Almayer's Folly* (*La Folie Almayer*) and Philippe Garrel's *Un été brûlant*; the first two were highly thought of (both are in the LFF), the latter derided (although a couple of clever critics I met suggested Garrel is in dire need of rescue from his by now numerous detractors).

The British films acquitted themselves well, taking home more prizes than any other national cinema, and festival director Marco Müller divulged over a lunch with critics how impressed he was with current British production, echoing the views of our own Nick James. British films took both critics' prizes – Steve McQueen's *Shame* and Ben Rivers's *Two Years at Sea* (both in the LFF) – and among the festival jury prizes there were two more, for Robbie Ryan's cinematography on *Wuthering Heights* (also in the LFF) and Best Actor for Michael Fassbender in *Shame*, both inarguable. Not a bad haul, so the round-up should probably commence on home turf (leaving aside *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, which we dealt with at length in the October issue, and Simon Pummell's intriguingly Cronenbergian *Shock Head Soul*, which I wrote about in a blog from the festival).

Shame focuses on Michael Fassbender's sex- and porn-addicted high-flier, whose super-controlled Manhattan lifestyle is disrupted by his damaged sister (Carey Mulligan) inviting herself to stay and seducing his boss; cue an inevitable unravelling. McQueen's film is big, confident, visually seductive – and not just because Fassbender is such a watchable screen presence; it's a pronounced advance stylistically on the director's debut feature *Hunger* (and much more coherent too). There are even some well-handled moments of comedy and social embarrassment.

I do worry, though, that McQueen is developing a line in slightly portentous one-word titles, and this observation opens on to other concerns. As the film wore on, I started to detect something schematic, even clichéd in the conception of the Fassbender character, which manifests itself in some misjudged late scenes and a very British-cinema tendency to dramatic overstatement. There's a finger-wagging moralism, too, linked to the film's title. That said, one scene was incredible: a threesome in which Fassbender's face expresses torments of ecstatic agony, St Teresa style. For all my reservations, I have no doubts that *Shame* will be a huge success commercially.

Andrea Arnold's *Wuthering Heights* might be a tougher sell, by virtue of its cast of unknowns. We all know the story, but Arnold's bold tack is to treat

it like a work of pulp fiction (which it may well in fact be), complete with bone-crunching violence, racism, swearing (count the number of "fucking cunts"), strong Yorkshire accents, every bodily fluid imaginable and a robust outdoor sex scene (not Heathcliff and Catherine, I hasten to add). We even get the child Catherine licking the blood off Heathcliff's wound.

That prizewinning cinematography makes the moors look eerie and otherworldly, the casting of a black Heathcliff situates the novel explicitly in the era of colonialism, and the supernatural element is delicately handled. All to the good – so why did I feel detached and mildly bored throughout? The performances aren't great, for one thing, and there's a distinct lack of dramatic momentum, with the flashbacks in the second half seeming particularly misconceived (there's a horrific misstep with the end-credits music too). It ultimately feels a bit mannered, a too obvious deconstruction of the novel from the director of *Fish Tank*. But Arnold's film certainly has its admirers: one colleague said the direction put him in mind of Claire Denis. I couldn't have disagreed more, but it points to what's missing for me – to wit Denis's magical gift for making desire palpable. For all the effort on display, there was very little electricity being generated.

Equivocation was definitively banished by two of the smaller budget British films screening over in Orizzonti. Ben Rivers's first feature *Two Years at Sea* follows the director's countless prizewinning shorts, and revisits the subject of one of them: a solitary called Jake Williams, living in a ramshackle but beautiful old house deep in the Aberdeenshire wilds. Rivers's film situates itself in that popular and fertile liminal territory, not quite documentary, not quite fiction, observing Jake on his diurnal round – pottering, walking, sleeping, just staring into the fire or into space – and building in a few nice touches, which I won't spoil. It also looks incredible; to shoot the film, Rivers bought up the final batches of his favourite black-and-white Kodak 16mm filmstock, Plus X, just before it was discontinued, and processed it by hand in his own kitchen, as is his wont. All the formal glitches on display give the film an archaic feel – and are completely integrated into the overall conception. Rivers is a massive talent, and one of the great pleasures of the century's second decade will be seeing where he takes it.

Last but not least of the British participants was Andrew Köting, whose *This Our Still Life* (aka *Louyre*) proved as divisive in Venice as it has been in Britain, where it was rejected for the LFF. Köting has essentially edited together just over a decade's worth of home footage into seasonal segments, documenting his family's move to an old house in the Pyrenees (shades of Jake Williams in its isolation) and the years since. He has added some brilliant snatches of music to give shape and flow, plus audio fragments and text overlays. Köting has always been a bit of a rag 'n' bone filmmaker, a bricoleur yoking disparate, scattered fragments together; it can be hit or miss, but for me this film is more the former by far. A sometimes oblique, sometimes powerfully direct taking-stock, it's a meditation on transience, memory, mortality and particularly his and his partner's relationship with their daughter, who suffers from a rare genetic disorder. Of all the British films in Venice, this for me was easily the most profound and moving. ➡



POWER PLAYS
Aleksandr Sokurov's *'Faust'*, above, won the Golden Lion, while another audience favourite was Sono Sion's *'Himizu'*, top

Venice top 10

- 1 *Alps* (Yorgos Lanthimos)
- 2 *Whores' Glory* (Michael Glawogger)
- 3 *Faust* (Aleksandr Sokurov)
- 4 *Cut* (Amir Naderi)
- 5 *This Our Still Life* (Andrew Köting)
- 6 *Two Years at Sea* (Ben Rivers)
- 7 *The Cardboard Village/Il villaggio di cartone* (Ermanno Olmi)
- 8 *Himizu* (Sono Sion)
- 9 *The Flock of the Lord/Die Herde des Herrn* (Romuald Karmakar)
- 10 *Palaces of Pity/Palácios de pena* (Gabriel Abrantes, Daniel Schmidt)

If anyone in contemporary American cinema is the inheritor of Nicholas Ray's renegade spirit, it's surely Abel Ferrara



END GAMES

Fraught, febrile relationships lie at the heart of Abel Ferrara's '4:44 Last Day on Earth', left, and Teresa Villaverde's 'Swan', right

◀ The film I was most looking forward to was Yorgos Lanthimos's *Alps* (*Alpis*), and it didn't disappoint. There were the inevitable 'it's not as good as *Dogtooth*' complaints, but in fact it feels closer to Lanthimos's first film *Kinetta* in its focus on bizarre group rituals and dynamics – in this case among a small cadre of men and women called Alps (the leader is Mont Blanc), who run a service to impersonate the just-deceased in order to help grieving relatives come to terms with their loss and move on. In its grasp of off-kilter psychology, the depth and coherence of its absurdist vision, the rigour and precision of its execution, and the brilliance of its governing premise, this was definitely the best film I saw in Venice. Lanthimos deservedly won the Best Screenplay prize, together with his co-writer Efthimis Filippou, and he could well have got the Golden Lion too.

In the end that prize went to Aleksandr Sokurov's *Faust*, a loose, technically flawless adaptation of Goethe's text, and a fitting end to the director's tetralogy of power (although you could argue it's the opening to it, and philosophically an opening-out). Those three previous films – *Moloch* (1999), *Taurus* (*Telets*, 2001) and *The Sun* (*Solntse*, 2005), on Hitler, Lenin and Hirohito respectively – were all far more low-key and reined-in than this baroque leviathan. Sokurov's relentlessly roaming camera ushers us into every nook of a vividly realised medieval German town, where the poverty-stricken, tormented Faust plies his trade as a doctor too penniless to afford food, let alone the bodies he needs to dissect in his quest for the location of the soul. As in the Lanthimos film, there's a preoccupation with language, although differently focused; whereas in *Alps* it served to reveal the characters' disconnectedness, Sokurov dwells on language's dense materiality, its cascading shapes and rhythms, woven by Faust as he talks himself ever nearer to the perdition dangled before him by the town's diabolical moneylender.

Idiosyncratic efforts

If *Faust* was quite unlike anything else being made right now, there were other equally idiosyncratic efforts to savour, although not unreservedly. Sono Sion (*Love Exposure*) weighed in with *Himizu*, a

demented elegy for post-tsunami Japan. A hard-hitting admixture of embittered family drama, farcical comedy, slapstick and acid social comment, its frenetic pitch and cartoon-like violence at times make it resemble a Punch and Judy show. I didn't like it quite as much as others seemed to, but its relentless attack and its complex, elusive tone certainly demand respect, and it does somehow become oddly moving by the end.

From Portugal came another slow-burner: Teresa Villaverde's *Swan* (*Cisne*) traces the febrile relationships of a singer with a suicidal lover and a much younger man. At times I found it a bit precious and self-conscious, elliptical to a fault, but it has great moments and exquisite cinematography. I eventually warmed to these characters, too, at the same time feeling suffused with gratitude that films like this are still getting made.

You could say as much about pretty much the whole oeuvre of Abel Ferrara, whose end-of-the-world scenario *4:44 Last Day on Earth* was – together with the restoration of Nicholas Ray's wired, fascinatingly unshackled 1970s experiment *We Can't Go Home Again* – the best American film I saw. If anyone in contemporary American cinema is the inheritor of Ray's renegade spirit, it's surely Ferrara. Where Lars von Trier trafficked in German romanticism to give heft to his recent end-of-the-world vision *Melancholia*, Ferrara's romanticism is of a more modest sort, attached broadly to beatnik New York, its lofts, musicians, artists, druggies, crazies and general crankiness, as expressed through the relationship of Willem Dafoe and Shannyn Leigh. Simultaneously abrasive and tender, the film is at its best when the sometimes irritating talk comes to a halt and the camera just noses around the couple's apartment, watching the terrible events unfold on various screens, or moves out into the oddly subdued New York night. In those moments it really manages to channel something strange and mysterious.

What seemed strangest of all about *4:44*, though, was the fact that in a festival so seemingly inun-

dated with rape, genital shots, sexual obsession, sadism and masochism – you name it – Abel Ferrara had turned up with something relatively muted by comparison, even if it is about the end of the world. As at least one of our festival bloggers noted, it seems that much of the current dread in the world alights on the shoulders of women, in films such as *Louise Wimmer* (homelessness) and Orizzonti prizewinner *Kotoko* (mental disintegration). I found the latter hard going, the sheer viscosity of its shrieking onslaught in early scenes nigh-on unbearable. Russian director Angelina Nikonova's *Twilight Portrait* (*Portret v Sumerkakh*) was more low-key. While the notion of a woman falling for her rapist is hardly new, it was handled with some subtlety here. I'm not sure I completely bought it ultimately, but Nikonova has a formidable eye, anchoring the drama superbly in the grimmer realities of contemporary Russia.

Century of Birthing (*Siglo ng Pagluluwal*), the new film by Filipino Lav Diaz, is short by his standards – a mere six hours – but unfortunately I had to leave early to catch the plane home. What I saw of it was riveting on many levels, seeming to corral and develop some of the preoccupations of other works in the festival, particularly around faith and spirituality, linking them in this instance to cinema. Coming to it straight from the Ben Rivers, though – which was still ravishing even though digitally projected, a celluloid print not being ready in time – I was slightly perturbed by occasional pixellation of the image and a distracting digital sheen, which prompted a question: if one of the avowed aims of a specific brand of long-take contemplative cinema is to capture and convey spiritual energy – an inner vibration, whether in things or in people – to what extent is the digital medium actually equipped to do so?

Venice afforded an opportunity to finally catch the work of a director I'd only ever read about previously, and on the strength of *Amore carne*, Pippo Delbono could become something of a guilty pleasure. Critically he was simply ignored by everyone else, despite being invited to share a round-table discussion with august presences Chantal Akerman and Philippe Garrel. Shot on the cheapest equipment imaginable, *Amore carne* is a personal essay film – an anguished meditation on disease, growing old, history, politics, his mother and more, initiated both by a trip to the doctor (Delbono is HIV positive) and by the sight of some weeds pushing through the cracks in paving stones, which in turn prompts recollection of a similar image in a work by his friend Pina Bausch.

At times *Amore carne* made me think of Agnès Varda's recent essay films, but it's more chaotic and free-form. Ultimately Delbono really goes off the deep end, combining wild music, poetry and ranting – to hysterical, operatic effect. On this evidence, he's the Serge Gainsbourg of the essay film. If he lost me in the last ten minutes or so, there was still much to admire and be touched by en route. That image of weeds forcing their way through the cracks, for one, seemed like a pretty apt metaphor for this year's festival.

■ 'Wuthering Heights' is released on 11 November; 'This Our Still Life' is released on 18 November; 'Shame' is released on 13 January



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Some of the big-name premieres disappointed, but the sheer scale of this year's Toronto International Film Festival guaranteed some interesting discoveries, says **Tom Charity**

BENEATH THE TINSEL

Brad Pitt, this is your stop," cracked the streetcar driver on my first morning in Toronto. Weary commuters barely raised a smile, and no, the *Moneyball* star had not forsaken his limo. Few festivals can compete with the Toronto International Film Festival for red-carpet wattage – whether it's Pitt, Clooney, Jolie or Madonna, there is always another luminary to keep the paparazzi popping. The lightbulbs kept right on flashing even inside the lobby of the Bell Lightbox, TIFF's new HQ – part of a display promoting the Fellini exhibition in the building's gallery space.

For all the confluence of movie stars, parties and mass media, nothing in Toronto could compete with the revelations coming out of Rome (Berlusconi's eight-women-in-a-night romps would make a hell of a Fellini picture). The closest thing to a scandal was a rumour reported in *The Globe and Mail* that volunteers had been told not to look at Madonna as she made her way to the North American premiere of *W.E.* (a story her management quickly disputed). Underneath the tinsel, however, the festival is still capable of the odd inspired gesture, be it putting on free screenings of Mark Cousins's *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (all 900

minutes of it) and Jafar Panahi's *This Is Not a Film* (reviewed from Cannes, *S&S*, July), or reaching back to Hugo Santiago's suppressed 1969 intrigue *Invasion* – a rare screenwriting outing by Jorge Luis Borges – to kick off a programme of Buenos Aires movies (this year's 'City to City' focus).

Easily the most important (and self-important) film festival in North America, TIFF sucks up the prime titles from Sundance, Berlin, Cannes and Venice, and still makes room for 123 world premieres – almost half of the 249 features that screened here this year.

Some two thirds of those movies screened on digital formats this year – mostly DCP (digital cinema package) – which makes you wonder how long the term 'film festival' can persist. In another sign of the times, both the opening and closing-night gala slots were filled by titles that will be shown on cable TV in North America within the month: Davis Guggenheim's documentary about the birth of U2's *Achtung Baby* album, *From the Sky Down* (not even the second best rock doc in the festival) and David Hare's TV drama *Page Eight*, which might be seen as small consolation for the glaring absence of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*.

As in Venice, the British presence was strongly felt, with Steve McQueen's powerful *Shame* among

the most highly praised films in the festival (for a review, see Venice report p.42). It was one of only four films to score an A- grade on Indiewire's Criticwire aggregator.

Like Andrea Arnold's proudly cruddy *Wuthering Heights* (see Venice), Michael Winterbottom insists on placing *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in the present tense (literally: it's set in contemporary India). *Trishna* is a free adaptation, and then some... Freida

Toronto top 10

- 1 **Shame** (Steve McQueen)
- 2 **The Descendants** (Alexander Payne)
- 3 **Take Shelter** (Jeff Nichols)
- 4 **The Student/El estudiante** (Santiago Mitre)
- 5 **Twilight Portrait/Portret v Sumerkakh** (Angelina Nikonova)
- 6 **I Wish/Kiseki** (Kore-eda Hirokazu)
- 7 **Faust** (Aleksandr Sokurov)
- 8 **Martha Macy May Marlene** (Sean Durkin)
- 9 **The Patron Saints** (Brian M. Cassidy, Melanie Shatzky)
- 10 **Invasion** (Hugo Santiago, 1969)

Pinto is the rickshaw driver's daughter who turns the head of a British entrepreneur (Riz Ahmed from *Four Lions*) and defies convention to be with him. Winterbottom has pertinent things to say about sex, class and power, but *Trishna* appears to have been made without a screenplay (the director gets his first solo script credit since *9 Songs*) – and it shows in too many vacuous, repetitive improvisational scenes. With significant pruning, there could be something in here.

As for David Cronenberg's **A Dangerous Method** (which partly counts as a British film on the basis of its writer Christopher Hampton and producer Jeremy Thomas), this highly charged drama is a more restrained, cerebral piece than might have been expected from such a visceral director. Hampton's source play was called *The Talking Cure* – fair warning, because there is a lot of talk here, as well as a fleet chronicle tracing Jung's ascent as Freud's natural heir in the crusade for psychoanalytic treatment, their eventual falling-out, and Jung's affair with a patient, Sabina Spielrein (an all-or-nothing performance by a Russian-accented Keira Knightley that didn't work for me at all). *A Dangerous Method* is never less than interesting, especially in its witty, Oedipal delineation of the great theorists' mentor-pupil relationship (Viggo Mortensen's sly portrait of Freud is a real pleasure), but at least at first blush it's a disappointingly broad-stroke history and a rather anti-climactic, bloodless tale of *amour fou*.

Among other semi-British efforts, Pawel Pawlikowski's largely unheralded **The Woman in the Fifth** is an elegant psychological thriller with Ethan Hawke as an American writer who's in Paris to reconnect with his infant daughter (despite his wife's restraining order). Mugged within hours of his arrival, he is drawn into a shady job arranged by his enigmatic French-Algerian landlord – and into a sexual tryst by a yet more mysterious Kristin Scott Thomas. It's all so adroit and intriguing that it's crushing when Pawlikowski tries to slip the contrived and unconvincing denouement past us.

Pawlikowski's fifth *arrondissement* gives us Americans, Eastern Europeans and Arabs at cross purposes, without straining for any universalist metaphor. There's considerably more heavy lifting afoot in **360**, scriptwriter Peter Morgan's globalised ensemble drama, allegedly inspired by Arthur Schnitzler's play *La Ronde*. It's directed by Fernando (City of God) Meirelles, a confident slickster capable of easing us from London to Chicago, and Phoenix to Paris, without breaking stride. But when it comes to imbuing Morgan's lovelorn itinerants with irony and grace, he's not exactly Max Ophuls; indeed his glossy *mise en scène* tends to flatten out any spark of individuality that the polyglot cast (including Anthony Hopkins, Jude Law, Rachel Weisz and Jamel Debbouze) insinuates. Sentimental and sanctimonious, *360* clings to the surface, clutching coincidence for comfort – like *Love Actually* with the jokes taken out.

Getting away from the Brits at last (and let's draw a discreet veil around Nick Broomfield and Joan Churchill's lazy Sarah Palin doc *You Betcha!*), there were a couple of more-than-promising US independent features, Jeff Nichols's *Take Shelter* and Sean Durkin's *Martha Macy May Marlene* (both reviewed from Cannes, see *S&S*, July), plus Oren Moverman's follow-up to *The Messenger*, the hard-boiled cop drama **Rampart**. Featuring Woody Harrelson's best ever bad-ass performance,



SEMI-BRITISH
Kristin Scott Thomas and Ethan Hawke, in 'The Woman in the Fifth'; top, Anthony Hopkins in '360'; facing page, Keira Knightley in 'A Dangerous Method'

Rampart is essentially the same semi-repulsed, semi-sympathetic portrait of a bigot with a badge that screenwriter James Ellroy has been painting for decades, but Moverman gives it real snap – not least by pitting Harrelson's super-articulate Brown against a scintillating posse of intelligent women (including Robin Wright, Sigourney Weaver, Anne Heche and Cynthia Nixon, as well as Brie Larson as the rebellious teen daughter who infuriates her dad by using his station nickname, "Date Rape"). Still awaiting a US distribution deal as I write, *Rampart* should net Harrelson an Academy Award nomination – though early reviews suggest it may be too dark for US critics.

George Clooney is an altogether safer bet for Alexander Payne's **The Descendants**, a domesticated version of a similar character. Not that Clooney's Matt King is a bigot or a womaniser, but he's another middle-aged husband and father who is surprised to find how peripheral he's become to his wife and daughters. In the same bittersweet, tragi-farical mode as *Sideways* and *About Schmidt*, *The Descendants* finds rich, pungent flavours in its authentic, often rainy Hawaiian setting, a mellow slack-key guitar soundtrack, and the confusing, conflicting dynamics that an unexpected death can inspire. Clooney's subtle performance is



COMEBACK KIDS
Greta Gerwig, right, in Whit Stillman's 'Damsels in Distress'; top, Val Kilmer in Francis Ford Coppola's semi-3D 'Twixt'

among his most moving to date, while Payne, for his part, seems to have tempered his sometimes cruel satiric instincts with a more empathetic eye for frailty and fallibility. Not that he doesn't still nail the easy lies we like to tell ourselves, but there's a cautious optimism beneath his cynicism.

What else? I wish I could say something positive about Francis Ford Coppola's **Twixt**, a cockamamie ghost story that merrily tosses together Corman and Poe, *The Twilight Zone*, 3D gimmickry, Bruce Dern, Tom Waits and a recreation of the speedboat death of the director's son Gio... Coppola even allows Val Kilmer (as horror novelist Hall Baltimore) to throw in an impression of Brando doing Kurtz. It's a curio, and no one else could have made it – but it's the very definition of a farrago.

As for another even more long-awaited big-name comeback, Whit Stillman's **Damsels in Distress** is an unexpectedly crude, vapid, inchoate campus comedy from this self-styled sophisticate, which manages to condescend to just about everybody without suggesting Stillman has a single worthwhile idea in his head.

■ 'The Descendants' is released on 27 January 2012; 'A Dangerous Method' is released on 10 February 2012



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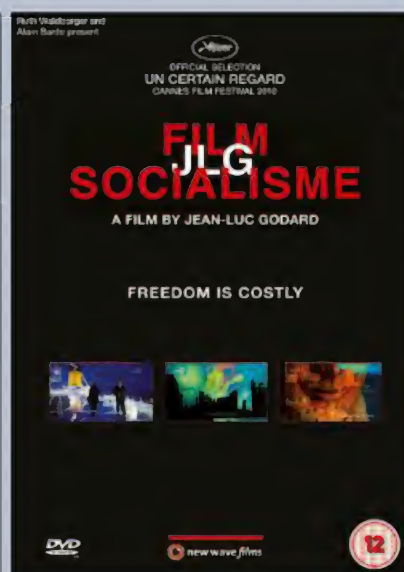
Le Quattro Volte
Michelangelo Frammartino

The film that took last year's Cannes by surprise, Le Quattro Volte explores the cycles of life, time and space in a portrait of a Calabrian village that moves from man to goats to a tree. It works both as a simple celebration of nature and as an exploration of our place in the world, and an extraordinary piece of pure and often very funny cinema.

★★★★★
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Trevor Johnston, Time Out

★★★★★
'Overpoweringly lovable'
Nigel Andrews, The Financial Times

★★★★★
'Superbly filmed... deeply affecting'
Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian
'A film at once poetic, beautiful, comic, philosophical, hugely complex and sublimely simple'
Jonathan Romney, Sight and Sound



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★★★★★
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David Jenkins, Time Out

'The visual drama is extraordinary... breathtaking images.'
Amy Taubin, Film Comment

'Bursting with a new wave of anger and vitality, re-tooling the language of cinema'
Jason Solomons, The Observer

'FILM SOCIALISME's tableau expands every day, Godard's shattered mirror re-assembling triumphantly in the mind of whoever is willing to look and engage.'
Gabe Klinger, Sight and Sound

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.....
Like all the best American political movies,
Clooney's **The Ides of March** plumbs the gulf
between the public statements of high-flying
aspiration and the messy, sordid world of
backroom deals and personal fallibility **p63**
.....

A change is gonna come

Having discovered a goldmine of original footage of the Black Power movement in the archives of Swedish television, documentarist Göran Olsson has crafted it into a remarkable document of the times, says **Mark Sinker**

The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975

Göran Olsson, 2011



Literacy and education, argues Emmanuel Todd in *After the Empire: the Breakdown of the*

American Order, are of course essential to the rise of democracy, equality and justice. They're also vectors, initially, of traumatised conflict, anxiety and rupture. "The move into modernity," Todd writes, "is frequently accompanied by an explosion of ideological violence." It's a general historical point – he's likening the recently turbulent Islamic world to Europe during its religious-war phase – and he doesn't specifically discuss the black experience in America. Göran Olsson's documentary *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* does, of course. Indeed some have suggested that this astute tapestry of the Swedish news footage of the time, recut to sketch the tale of the Black Power movement against present-day commentary from participants and younger sympathetic observers, doesn't do enough to set the tale in a wider context, let alone establish any kind of balanced ledger of success or failure.

This may be true; the film doesn't editorialise, achieving perspective largely tonally, as the black-and-white footage of the first half – with its sense of the shock of change unfolding – shifts to washed-out, downcast, almost autumnal colour footage in the early 1970s, as drugs seem to flood out radical politics, and the potential for high-speed transformation shifts into impasse and bitter comedown. But by resisting the impulse to let present-day moralists tamp the story into safe hindsight shape (the younger rappers attempt a light dusting of this in the commentary) it allows us to glimpse rawer and more remarkable elements of mutual transformation in real time – the before and after of events new under the sun, that can only happen once.

In particular, of course, we're seeing black faces – suddenly no longer just as entertainers, but as participants given serious political weight – entering high-tech media just as this media itself arrived at the extraordinary, charged transition to global reach and interplay. There's something exhilaratingly, even overwhelmingly emotional and disorientating in this sense of encounter during crisis: the discovery of injustice everywhere, far beyond one's own community, and the possibility of unprecedented cultural and political identification, as traditional American modes of expression (the cadences of the black church in particular) expand to encompass the many jargons of international and third-world Marxism and anti-colonialism, from Marcuse to Fanon and beyond. And the people of the world beyond – specifically the Swedes, perhaps as naive about America as America is unaware of them – gaze back, and bring their own quiet presence to bear.

In 1964, as part of his rigorous self-education, Malcolm X journeyed to the Old World to study Islam. Until just before that time, he had been the anointed

spokesman of Elijah Muhammad's US-based Nation of Islam (NoI), but in Africa and the Middle East he discovered no reverence for and little interest in his erstwhile mentor. Already at odds with the NoI, Malcolm now began to become at once more orthodox in his religion and more internationalist and confrontational in his politics. The consequence, in 1965, was his assassination by members of the NoI (though many saw the hand of the US government in the act).

Indeed it seemed to be open season on black leaders and communities: from Medgar Evers, murdered in 1963, to Martin Luther King in 1968. King, of course, had developed the strategy of non-violence, but many younger black voices began arguing that a purely non-violent response no longer made sense. In 1966 Huey Newton and Bobby Seale had set up the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence in Oakland, California – "self-defence" meaning they were armed. Stokely Carmichael, chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, was popularising the term "Black Power"; and as Mao had noted, political power flows from the barrel of a gun.

This is the backstory; and intricate as it is – awareness of the intense tactical differences and factional rivalries involved would take pages to detail – viewers of *The Black Power Mixtape* are expected to supply it for themselves. Right at the start, one Al, owner of a small Florida-beach burger joint, exclaims that Americans are better off than anywhere else in the world, and this is very nearly the last white American voice we hear. The documentary offers a view of a movement from within itself – albeit an intensely divided movement, led by eloquent, charismatic, often contradictory people. But divisions and contradictions are not dwelt on; it's not always clear if the filmmakers who shot the footage were aware of them at the time.

What the film can offer are those glimpses of key moments of transition: for example the moment when the young Carmichael, serious yet gentle, decides to take the microphone from a Swedish interviewer to coax the most potent story from his own mother. Or at a press conference in Stockholm, where journalists are asking him if he's afraid of jail. "I was born in jail," he quips, a spur-of-the-moment invention, and then widens his eyes and purses his mouth at them, as if to say, "What d'you think of that!?"

No one had been a better, smarter student than Angela Davis: she'd travelled widely in Europe, and a place in the elite was hers for the taking. Yet in 1970 we're watching her interviewed while on trial for her life, after she bought the gun used in the kidnap and murder of a judge. Pale, exhausted, frightened, yet alertly articulate, she responds to a Swedish question about violence, at first with sardonic exasperation and communist cliché. But then, as she casts about for an argument more fit for the situation, she plunges back into her own history: back to Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church. Four small black girls, girls she knew personally, were blown to pieces, "limbs and heads strewn over the place". And yes, the local black community armed itself as a



It seemed to be open season on black leaders and communities: from Medgar Evers, murdered in 1963, to Martin Luther King in 1968



POWER TO THE PEOPLE
'The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975'
 combines archive footage of street-level
 Black Panther activism, above, and
 leaders such as Martin Luther King,
 far left, with Harry Belafonte

consequence. You hear the shift in her voice as she recounts the change in her community, the decision made. You can trace the logic to Mao, or to the Second Amendment to the US Constitution – the right of all its citizens to own and bear arms. But chances are this is a kind of moralising also: the muffling hindsight that obliterates the filmmakers' camera-captured instant.

Obliteration is what the final quarter of the film mainly shows, perhaps in spite of itself. It's dominated by an extended 1974 interview with Louis Farrakhan, Elijah Muhammad's successor (and, many believe, the man who ordered Malcolm X's killing). Farrakhan's a silky and energised charmer, whose quasi-religious will to outrage ("the white race is a race of devils") seems a dogmatic world away from 1967, a shutdown into narrow parochial and reactionary certainty.

The NoI brought discipline – and an escape from the drugs that flooded the ghetto. But the cultural pride they enforced – hostile to all

curiosity, to any non-sanctioned learning – is just a step away from self-loathing; it's far more about fear than courage. The most heartbreaking image of all here, however, is about both: a teenage junkie prostitute that same year telling the camera, firm of voice but through a film of tears, that she thinks she can make it. Did she, you wonder?

"The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose," James Baldwin famously wrote, and the wisdom of that argument suffuses this documentary. Carmichael would flee into exile and there, as a guest of one of Africa's mid-rank pseudo-Marxist dictators, become a sometime apologist for a mirror-image oppression – another end-of-arc that's beyond this film's scope.

"It's not about black and white," comments R&B singer Erykah Badu towards the end of the film, "it's about the story. We have to tell the story right. And that's why we as black people have to document our own history – or the history becomes twisted. We get written out." There's an irony here – involving non-black Swedes – but everyone involved is quietly aware of it.

For credits and synopsis, see page 54

Sayin' it loud

Göran Olsson on putting together 'The Black Power Mixtape'

There was a rumour around for years among filmmakers that Sweden had more archive material on the Black Panthers than the entire USA. A couple of years ago I was working on a film on Philly soul and was browsing the archives at Swedish Television – and found out that it was true. The stuff on the Black Power movement was amazing and rich – absolutely crisp footage, shown only once a long time ago in Sweden. The moment I saw the archive footage that makes up the film, I saw it as my duty to take these fantastic images from the cellar and make them accessible to an audience.

The film is a mixtape, not a remix. I wanted to keep the feeling of the material, not cut it into pieces. My respect not only for the personalities in the images, but also for the filmmakers, is total. The people in the film changed the world for the better. They showed that you couldn't sit around and wait for someone to give you your rights; you have to take a stand.

I decided to riff on the popular 1970s 'mixtape' format, which I felt would appeal aesthetically and formally to younger generations, and to include audio interviews with key contemporary figures to



GORAN OLSSON

complement the unusual beauty of 16mm archival [footage], putting the images in context. As a documentary filmmaker, you aren't quite sure how your subjects and interviewees are going to respond, especially on a film that covers many sensitive issues. But everyone we approached for interviews and participation was so generous.

The hardest part of doing 'The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975' was to leave out wonderful stuff that didn't fit into the storyline. For example, we had some awesome footage about the Shirley Chisholm campaign in 1972, and I still have sleepless nights for cutting it out. But we just couldn't make room for it.



Spot the difference: 'African Cats'

African Cats

USA 2011
Director: Keith Scholey
Certificate U 89m 17s

It's no great surprise to learn that Disney is the studio behind Keith Scholey and Alastair Fothergill's narrative-driven documentary, the third in Disney's trilogy on wild-life subjects following *Earth* (2007) and *Oceans* (2009). This latest film is comprised of stunning SFX-free images culled from footage that Scholey, Fothergill and their collaborators collected over two and a half years of filming in the Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, one of the wildest places on earth.

African Cats focuses on three families of lions and cheetahs, animals currently in worrying decline. The River Pride is a group of six lionesses and their many cubs, including Layla and her cub Mara; led by ageing but still magnificently imposing Fang, they roam the lands south of the Mara River. This is also where Sita, a fearless 'single mother' cheetah, lives with her playful five newborns. Drama ensues when lion Kali and his three sons, from the north of the river, take a fancy to the southern territory, inevitably confronting the other two families at various stages of the film.

In order to engage people with these remarkable felines, Scholey and Fothergill have refreshed the format of the well-trodden wildlife documentary by transforming it, in effect, into an entertaining, often electrifying drama-cum-thriller, and pitching the viewer right into the midst of the animals' everyday world, creating moving moments of extraordinary intimacy and beauty. Such proximity comes courtesy of high-definition cameras, which allow for some astonishing close-ups,

capturing the creatures' every move, expression and emotion – from the astounding definition of their muscles in mid-hunt to the tactile softness of the playful cubs. One of the most hair-raising images features Fang the lion roaring at a crocodile, who snaps back at him in extreme close-up, until eventually backing off.

There's just one drawback, which derives from the only human presence in the film: a syrupy-toned Samuel L. Jackson voiceover to spell everything out, even when the images speak for themselves. Nevertheless, the force of the very real dangers, drama, violence and pain that lie in wait for these predators can't be muted or tamed by it. In meticulous, self-effacing fashion, Scholey and Fothergill have created a universal story of epic proportions, which should resonate with audiences across the board.

♦♦ Mar Diestro-Dópido

CREDITS

Directed by
Keith Scholey
Co-directed by
Alastair Fothergill
Produced by
Keith Scholey
Alix Tidmarsh
Narration Written by
Keith Scholey
John Truby
Original Story
Keith Scholey
Owen Newman
Principal Photography
Owen Newman
Sophie Darlington
Edited by
Martin Elsbury
Music
Nicholas Hooper
Sound Designers
Tim Owens
Kate Hopkins

©Disney Enterprises, Inc.
Production Company
A Fothergill/Scholey production

Executive Producer
Disney Nature:
Don Hahn

WITH

Samuel L. Jackson
narrated by

Dolby Digital/Datasat
Digital Sound/SDDS
Colour by
DeLuxe
US prints by
DeLuxe
International prints by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista
International (UK)

8,035 ft +8 frames

Albatross

United Kingdom 2010
Director: Niall MacCormick
Certificate 15 89m 45s

"Charm is the great English blight. It does not exist outside these damp islands." *Albatross*, an endearing, slight and gently funny coming-of-age tale, brings this finger-wagging verdict from *Brideshead Revisited* to mind, thanks to its intensely English and undeniably charming combination of rueful domestic comedy and wistful relationship-making. One of those films in which a character bursts into a family and shakes it up like a bedspread (aptly enough, since freewheeling teenager Emilia is hired as a maid in the Fischers' small seaside hotel), it's so busy being cutely funny, with intervals of winsome reflection in beauty spots, that it forgets to whip up much in the way of a plot.

Screenwriter Tamzin Rafn cheerfully admits that David Leland's *Wish You Were Here* (1987) was a strong influence on this piece (visibly so, when Emilia flashes her breasts as proof of age in order to buy alcohol) but opts for a softer, sweeter take on the idea of the spirited girl cutting loose in a small town that stifles her. Chat, practised as a very English flow of teasing filled with ironic asides, is the engine of seduction here, as Emilia's vivacity grabs the attention of both timid teenager Beth and her father Jonathan, a blocked writer whose marriage to the

shrewish Joa is mired in mutual disappointment. The film's funniest scenes show Emilia mischievously cutting through the creaking tensions and tossed barbs of the family dinner table, and creating havoc with illicit vodka at a ghastly P-themed birthday party for Beth's younger sister Posy. However, by the time Emilia's creative writing lessons with Jonathan have turned into the inevitable affair, the film dips into predictability, leavened only by her naked scorn at how his successful first book has hobbled him completely as an author.

Far more enjoyable is the growing bond between Emilia and Beth, which culminates in a riotous entrance-interview trip to an Oxford college, where Beth shakes off her good-girl reticence. There's a nod towards the mutual fascination of teenage female friendship, *My Summer of Love*-style, though nothing remotely erotic emerges from the pair's increasingly intense exchanges, since this is Middle England, not *Theorem*. When Jonathan's affair is discovered, it's the rift between the girls that registers, mostly because Jessica Findlay Brown and Felicity Jones have brought a pleasing, unforced naturalism to the relationship. Findlay Brown's sloe-eyed exhibitionist Emilia may have the showier role and the lion's share of the wisecracks, but Brown's anxious, dogged Beth is often the film's linchpin. None of the other characters has anything like the definition, or interest, of the central pair, though Sebastian Koch musters a subtle and weary self-hatred as Jonathan, sparking



Crest of a wave: Jessica Brown Findlay, Felicity Jones

nicely off Julia Ormond's brittle Joa ("You are the Grand Poobah of failure!").

First-time feature director Niall MacCormick is as adroit with both comic and sensitive elements here as he was with TV's *Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley* (2008), which won him a Bafta nomination. But he can't arrest the film's last-act decline into maudlin life-lesson, when Emilia discovers that her much vaunted family connection to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (the symbolic albatross of the title, which has hindered her attempts at writing) is a lie, fabricated by her dead mother. As Emilia flounders in search of self-realisation, the film's chat-and-charm offensive dries up, drawing attention to the increasingly thin stuff underneath. When she opts for a writer's solitary life, the narrative can't find its footing, so dependent has it become on her deadpan observations and fizzing interactions. Charm, once its strong suit, has become the film's own albatross.

◆ **Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Produced by
Adrian Sturges
Original Screenplay
Tamin Rafn
Director of Photography
Jan Jonaeus
Editor
Mark Eckersley
Production Designer
Paul Cripps
Composer
Jack Arnold
Production Sound Mixer
Simon Farmer
Costume Designer
Charlotte Holdich

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Three Limited
Production Companies
CinemaNX and Isle of Man Film present
Executive Producers
Steve Christian
Marc Samuelson

CAST

Sebastian Koch
Jonathan
Julia Ormond
Joa
Felicity Jones
Beth
Peter Vaughan
Grandpa
Harry Treadaway
Jake
Thomas Brodie
Sangster
Hazel Douglas
Mark
Granny
Katie Overd
Posy
Alexis Zegerman
manageress
Jessica Brown Findlay
Emelia

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
CinemaNX Ltd

8,077 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS The South coast of England, present day. Orphaned 17-year-old wild child Emilia takes a job as a cleaner at Cliff House hotel. She befriends shy Beth, daughter of the hotel's unhappily married owners Jonathan and Joa. An aspiring writer and descendant of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Emilia begins creative writing lessons with Jonathan, an author facing writer's block following the success of his first book. They start an affair. Emilia accompanies Beth to her Oxford entrance interview, and Beth gains confidence and learns to party. Beth has a pregnancy scare, Jonathan's affair is discovered, and Emilia pours scorn on him. Emilia's grandfather confesses that the Conan Doyle link is untrue, a story concocted by her dead mother. Emilia resolves to take charge of her life. Jonathan leaves Joa, giving his laptop to Emilia as a farewell gift. Emilia writes a book. Taking the manuscript to be copied months later, she sees Beth leave for Oxford in the 'I Put Out' T-shirt she gave her.

Anonymous

USA/United Kingdom
/Germany 2011

Director: Roland Emmerich
Certificate 12A 129m 54s

**ALSO
SHOWING
AT THE
LONDON FILM
FESTIVAL**

Canny publicity has nursed a row around Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous*, which brashly presents Edward de Vere,

Earl of Oxford, as the true author of Shakespeare's plays. Emmerich has confronted scholars in public debate, as rattled Shakespeareans rally to defend their man. Meanwhile, the De Vere Society has issued an exquisitely pained repudiation of the film's "illogical, unfounded speculation" – the idea that Elizabeth I boffed her own illegitimate son is too wingnut even for them.

The controversy surrounding the authorship of Shakespeare's works is largely a construct of recent centuries. Why do those seeking a more picturesque genius than a Warwickshire burgher prefer to tap a courtier? There's the snobbish conviction that only an aristocratic education could produce Shakespeare's range of reference (in the film, Oxford's study heaves with books, astrolabes and stuffed exotica). The plays are then viewed through the narrow prism of Elizabethan court politics – so screenwriter John Orloff (*A Mighty Heart*) suggests that *Hamlet* parodies Lord Burleigh, the queen's aged counsellor, while *Richard III* portrays his hunchbacked son Robert Cecil.

Suddenly, Emmerich's *Godzilla* seems a model of documentary rectitude. Cate Blanchett has already embodied a frisky Gloriana (in Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* films), and *Anonymous* feverishly portrays a lickerish monarch, frequently pregnant: she and Oxford have a son (the Earl of Southampton, dedicatee of sonnets by 'Shakespeare'). Not only that, we later learn that she is herself Oxford's mother, though she doesn't know this. (Or does she? "You never know with these Tudors," Cecil murmurs.)

The cast includes eminent British actors who have publicly cast doubt on Shakespeare's authorship: Mark Rylance plays a member of the Globe company, while Derek Jacobi's modern-day narrator bookends the film, echoing his role in Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*. He promises "a different story, a darker story" to the "cipher" of Shakespearean biography. The last prominent voyage around this material was *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), which had a nice sense of the happenstance of creation – its hero stumbling across golden lines and situations like a magpie. Emmerich rejects chance for conspiracy – everyone pursues a complicated agenda, and much of the dialogue is delivered slowly for added sneakiness. It's a world of surveillance and torture, with Shakespeare an illiterate dolt who gets lucky.

Emmerich's visuals have always been striking – sumptuously building up digital worlds only to destroy them.



Or not to be: Vanessa Redgrave

Working in CGI and at the Babelsberg Studios in Berlin, his design team creates a muddy-textured London of sewage-steeped streets; groundlings swarm into the Globe Theatre or around the bear pit. The camera rushes in close for paranoid conspiracy in candlelit chambers then whooshes back for panoramic views with misty, wintry skies: a typically vivid invention is Elizabeth's funeral down the frozen Thames, black-clad figures trudging over a snowy background.

The film casts a jaundiced eye over the often glamorous figures of heritage cinema. Vanessa Redgrave plays Elizabeth in her dotage, saggy flesh encased in stiff costumes, while Joely Richardson makes the younger queen a flirty vixen. As Shakespeare, Rafe Spall

gives everything to the screenplay's sottish whorehound, swaggering over his new coat of arms ("It cost a bloody fortune").

At least the role of Oxford gives Rhys Ifans an opportunity to showcase his lovely middle age – as in last year's *Greenberg*, his understated, melancholy rhythms are an asset. He gives the languid earl damp eyes, a fretful heart and perpetually ink-stained fingers, a graceful presence in a room full of stupid. But the film insists on a fervid, romantic myth of artistic endeavour, and even this most accomplished actor can't surmount lines like "The voices, Anne, the voices! I would go mad if I didn't write down the voices!"

◆ **David Jays**

CREDITS

Produced by
Roland Emmerich
Larry Franco
Robert Léger
Written by
John Orloff
Director of Photography
Anna J. Foerster
Edited by
Peter R. Adam
Production Designer
Sebastian Krawinkel
Music
Thomas Wander
Harald Kloser
Sound Mixer
Manfred Barach
Costume Designer
Lisy Christl

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Beverly Blvd LLC

Production Companies
Columbia Pictures
presents in association
with Relativity Media a
Centropolis
Entertainment
production in
association with Studio
Babelsberg
A Roland Emmerich film
A co-production among
Anonymous Pictures
Limited, Vierzehnte
Babelsberg Film GmbH,
Siebente Babelsberg
Film GmbH and Achte
Babelsberg Film GmbH
Supported by
Deutscher
Filmförderfonds,
Medienboard Berlin-
Brandenburg GmbH,
FFA, FFF Bayern

Executive Producers
Volker Engel
Marc Weigert
John Orloff

CAST

Rhys Ifans
Earl of Oxford
Vanessa Redgrave
Queen Elizabeth I
Joely Richardson
young Queen Elizabeth I
David Thewlis
William Cecil
Xavier Samuel
Earl of Southampton
Sebastian Armesto
Ben Jonson
Rafe Spall
William Shakespeare
Edward Hogg
Robert Cecil
Sebastian Reid
Earl of Essex

Jamie Campbell Bower
young Earl of Oxford
Trystan Gravelle
Christopher Marlowe
Helen Baxendale
Anne De Vere
Mark Rylance
Condell
Derek Jacobi
Prologue

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

11,691 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS In a present-day prologue, an actor addresses a theatre audience and suggests that William Shakespeare was not the real author of his plays.

In Elizabethan London, playwright Ben Jonson hides a bundle of manuscripts in a theatre. The soldiers pursuing him set the building alight. A subsequent interrogation reveals how Jonson met Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, a covert author. Oxford longs for an audience to respond to his work, but can't write under his own name. Jonson refuses to claim authorship on his behalf, but an illiterate actor named William Shakespeare decides to fulfil the role.

Flashback scenes show the young Oxford to be a precocious poet who is forced to abandon writing when Lord Burleigh, Queen Elizabeth's adviser, is appointed his guardian. Burleigh insists that Oxford marry his daughter, and promotes his duplicitous son Robert Cecil at court. Oxford's work has caught the queen's eye; they begin a passionate affair which produces an illegitimate son. Burleigh persuades Elizabeth to banish Oxford from court. Shakespeare wins fame for 'his' plays, and blackmails Oxford into secrecy. Oxford's son, the Earl of Southampton, joins the Earl of Essex to protest against Cecil's influence over the ageing queen. Oxford writes *Richard III* to rouse Londoners' sense of injustice, but Cecil has the rebellion quashed.

Oxford learns that Elizabeth is his own mother. The queen dies; so does Oxford, his authorship of Shakespeare's plays unknown... until Jonson rescues the manuscripts from the ruined theatre.

Apollo 18

USA/Canada 2011

Director: Gonzalo López-Gallego

Certificate 15 86m 27s

The 'found footage' horror cycle is usually traced back to Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), which hit on the notion of a filmed record left behind by characters who come to a bad end. Usually folk roll their cameras to the last, or have them taken away by malign entities who chronicle the gory finish, like the frenzied diarists of H.P. Lovecraft who scribble in italics as they are eaten by giant squid. The form was perfected and popularised by *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and given a commercial jolt by the success of *Paranormal Activity* (2007), but has also spawned some more elaborate efforts, such as the giant-monster-ridden *Cloverfield* (2008) and this year's *TrollHunter*.

This essay in the subgenre, directed by Gonzalo López-Gallego (*El rey de la montaña*), sticks closely to the usual pattern: unwary folks trespass in a remote region where something dreadful and dangerous bears them ill will, and turn on each other before they get got. Here the footage looks and sounds exactly like a real chronicle of the Apollo space missions, down to cramped camera angles, transmission interference, inaudible mission-control chatter and pristine close-ups of perfect bootprints in the lunar dust (one wonders how the undeveloped film was recovered from the abandoned

spaceship). Even the barbecue home movies of the off-duty astronauts have that stilted look of NASA PR designed to sell the space voyagers as ordinary family men. The only background information we are given about the protagonists is that Walker is divorced and Anderson has a loving son – which doesn't quite give them enough personality to establish them as identification figures or make them remote enough to suggest Kubrickian criticism of the emotional detachment needed by space pioneers.

The wilder elements begin with a secret Soviet moon mission, with a bolts-and-iron lunar module that might have come from one of the 1960s Russian science-fiction speculations recently showcased in a BFI Southbank season. Among the best jolts is the sudden flash of an unhelmeted cosmonaut's withered, Lon Chaney-as-the-Phantom-of-the-Opera face in the darkness, but the big bads here (spoiler) are evil moon rocks which sprout legs, spread a microbial infection and pounce viciously to explode heads. Like many an apparently clever alien monstrosity, the creatures show their hand too early, when just lying there like a rock and waiting to be taken to Earth would allow them to wreak much more damage (a 1963 *Outer Limits* episode, 'Corpus Earthling', had similar mineral monsters). Like the supernatural variations on this theme, this is more concerned with inexplicable horrors – these are the kind of movie aliens that might as well be demonic beings – than presenting anything like a credible lifecycle for its critters.

♦♦ Kim Newman

CREDITS

Produced by
Timur Bekmambetov
Michele Wolkoff
Written by
Brian Miller
Cory Goodman
Director of Photography
José David Montero
Editor
Patrick Lussier
Production Designer
Andrew Neskoromny
Production Sound Mixer
Darren Brisker
Costume Designer
Cynthia Ann Summers

Visual Effects
Bazelevs
C.L.R. / CG Factory
Atmosphere Visual Effects
The VFX Cloud
Artifex Studios
Faction Creative
Image Engine

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Production Companies
Bekmambetov Projects Ltd
Apollo 18 Productions
With the participation of the Province of British Columbia Production Services Tax Credit

Executive Producers
Ron Schmidt
Shawn Williamson
Cody Zwieg

CAST

Warren Christie
Ben Anderson
Lloyd Owen
Nate
Ryan Robbins
John Grey
Mike Kopsa
Deputy Secretary of Defense

Dolby Digital Colour by Technicolor [1.66:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

7.780 ft +8 frames

The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975

Sweden/USA/Norway/Germany/Switzerland/Finland/Greece 2011

Director: Göran Hugo Olsson



The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975 is our Film of the Month and is reviewed on page 50

CREDITS

Produced by
Annika Rogell
Written by
Göran Hugo Olsson
Edited by
Hanna Lejonqvist
Göran Hugo Olsson
Art Director
Stefania Malmsten
Music
Ahmir Questlove Thompson
Om'Mas Keith
Soundmix
Anders Nyström

©Story AB, Sveriges Television AB, and Louverture Films LLC
Production Companies
Produced by Story AB
Co-produced by Louverture Films, Sveriges Television
With support from the Swedish Film Institute (Lars G. Lindström), Nordisk Film & TV Fond, MEDIA Programme of the European Union, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee
Co-produced with ZDF in association with ARTE (Commissioning Editor Martin Pieper)
In association with Radio Télévision Suisse – RTS (Irene Chailand and Gaspard Lamunère), YLE Teema (Ritva Leino).

Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation – NRK (Tore Tornter), Greek Radio Television – ERT (Irene Gavala-Chardalia)
Executive Producer
Tobias Janson

In Colour/Black and White
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

SYNOPSIS The United States, 1967–75. Footage shot by several Swedish documentarists is woven together to sketch a version of the story of the Black Power movement. Beginning with the emergence to prominence of Stokely Carmichael, who likely popularised the phrase, it takes us through the early years of the Black Panther Party, the assassination of Martin Luther King and the riots that followed, the prison uprising at Attica, the trial, conviction and acquittal of Angela Davis for her involvement in the kidnap and shooting of a judge, and the consolidation of the influence of the Nation of Islam under Louis Farrakhan, with the Vietnam War in the background and the urban drug plague increasingly to the fore. Present-day commentary is supplied by Davis herself, poet Sonia Sanchez, historian Robin Kelley and Abiodun Oyewole of The Last Poets, as well as a group of younger musicians associated with 'conscious hip-hop' group The Roots.

Blood in the Mobile

Denmark/Germany/Democratic Republic of Congo/Uganda/France/Finland/Norway/Greece/Ireland/Hungary/The Netherlands/Israel 2010

Director: Frank Piasecki Poulsen

Frank Poulsen is both director and presenter of this personal investigation into reports that mobile-phone and other consumer electronics companies have been turning a blind (or at least rheumy) eye to the question of 'blood minerals' – raw materials such as coltan, cassiterite and bauxite which are extracted from Congolese mines, the profits financing an ongoing civil war that has killed five million people.

Initially presenting himself as a naive outsider in the manner of Evelyn Waugh's William Boot, Poulsen decides to go to Congo himself to trace mobile-phone company Nokia's supply chain to its rawest source. He initially arrives in the capital Kinshasa without much of a clue where to go next. However, after talking formally to Mr Kampekampe in the Congolese Ministry of Mining and informally to employees of the Mining Processing Company and a UN press officer (who tells a horrific story about an individual atrocity that's a grimly effective surrogate for millions of others), he works out both where he needs to go (the Bisie mine, which employs up to 20,000 workers) and the various bureaucratic hoops he has to jump through to get there.

It's clear that Poulsen put himself in considerable danger to get his footage of appalling living and working conditions in the mines: when he reaches living quarters that make the term 'shantytown' sound like five-star luxury, he finds dozens of spent shells from a recent massacre (euphemistically described by a UN official as "a rampage campaign") still lying in the dirt. With the help of Chance, a survivor, Poulsen manages to snatch some footage inside the mine, revealing expectedly horrific conditions, primitive tools and shockingly young faces (Chance himself is just 16, and has already been a miner for three years).

The film's second half is less successful, partly because both Poulsen and his Finnish foils at Nokia are far too polite to permit any genuine confrontation in the manner of Michael Moore or Roger Cook – at one point, Poulsen sheepishly apologises after accidentally bumping into a piece of furniture in the Nokia HQ lobby. After another bureaucratic obstacle course (the leitmotif linking both halves), he secures two interviews with Nokia spokespeople – but not the desired CEO – who both stonewall his questions with practised ease. In any case, Poulsen points out repeatedly that, as a loyal customer of 15 years' standing, he's targeting Nokia more in sorrow than in anger: other companies are just as culpable.

He has more fruitful journeys to

SYNOPSIS Footage leaked on the internet purports to document the fate of Apollo 18, officially NASA's last moon mission, launched in December 1973 on behalf of the US Department of Defense.

The mission's primary purpose is to place a missile-tracking device on the moon. Astronauts Nathan Walker, Benjamin Anderson and John Grey are required to keep their involvement secret even from their own families. While Grey orbits the moon in command module Freedom, Walker and Anderson land near the lunar south pole in the LEM Liberty. After establishing the tracking device, the astronauts find footprints and follow them to a Soviet one-man spacecraft which has touched down nearby – they also find the corpse of a cosmonaut who seems to have been attacked. A mysteriously mobile rock brought aboard the lunar module gets into Walker's spacesuit and wounds him – spreading an alien infection which drives him mad. Walker damages the Liberty before Anderson can take off; Anderson flees to the Russian ship, intending to launch it into lunar orbit and make a space-walk to the Freedom. Anderson is ordered by the Department of Defense not to leave the moon, but takes off after Walker is killed by strange rock-like creatures. Grey is ordered not to rescue Anderson, who is attacked by stowaway creatures, causing the Russian ship to collide with the Freedom.

The official story is that the three men died in various military accidents and their bodies were never found.



Ringin' the changes: 'Blood in the Mobile'

Hanover, London and Washington. Geologist Dr Frank Melcher demonstrates that, contrary to widespread rumour, it is possible to trace the origin of minerals such as coltan and cassiterite provided they're examined before they're smelted into metals. Poulsen also talks to organisations Global Witness and Raise Hope for Congo, and US congressman Jim McDermott, sponsor of the Conflict Minerals Trade Bill (which seeks to make it a legal requirement for US-marketed products to be completely transparent in their sourcing processes).

Prendergast is the most sanguine, pointing out that while openness along

the supply chain is clearly desirable, it's not going to prevent companies sourcing their minerals at the best price – only concerted action by global retailers can provide real pressure. He cites Walmart but Poulsen doesn't follow this up – possibly on the grounds that he thinks such pressure is unlikely to be applied. As Nokia's head of social responsibility points out to him, Poulsen's film may ultimately be as potent an awareness-raising weapon as anything else – assuming he can swallow the inescapable irony that modern digital distribution methods are as likely to involve blood minerals as anything manufactured by Nokia.

◆◆ **Michael Brooke**

CREDITS

Producer

Ole Tømbjerg

Cinematographers

Adam Wallerstein

Lars Skree

Frank Piasecki Poulsen

Editor

Mikael K. Ebbesen

Composer and Sound

Design

Kristian Eidnes

Andersen

©Koncern, Chili Film

and Gebrueder Beetz
Filmproduktion
Koncern presents in co-
production with Chili
Film, Gebrueder Beetz
Filmproduktion in
association with Yolé
Africa a film by Frank
Piasecki Poulsen
Produced with support
of The Danish Film
Institute (film
commissioner Michael
Haslund-Christensen),
Danida, Media,
Undervisningsministeriet

Its Tips & Lottomidler
In co-production with
WDR (commissioning
editor Barbara Schmitz)
In co-operation with DR
(commissioning editor
Mette Hoffmann
Meyer), ARTE
(commissioning editor
Sabine Rollberg)
In association with Yle
Co-productions
(commissioning editor
Erkki Astala), NRK, ERT,
TG4, Duna TV, VPRO,
Yes Docu

Executive Producers

Ole Tømbjerg
Jens Ulrik Pedersen

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Dogwoof Pictures

Danish theatrical title

Blod i mobilen

Cane Toads The Conquest

Australia/USA 2010

Director: Mark Lewis

Certificate PG 83m 51s

Back in 1988, Australian filmmaker Mark Lewis's mock-horror nature documentary *Cane Toads: An Unnatural History* gained cult status, drawing gushing critical comparisons with Monty Python and Luis Buñuel. Nearly a quarter of a century later, and shooting in high-resolution digital 3D, Lewis has delivered a sequel of sorts to his irreverent 45-minute original. The amphibians themselves, originally introduced into Queensland in the 1930s in an effort to control the beetles that were decimating sugar-cane crops, have continued to multiply at a remarkable rate – the female of the species can produce up to 100,000 eggs annually – and have proved impervious to efforts to cull their numbers; the director himself has described *Cane Toads: The Conquest* as a "plea for cohabitation".

Although no human has ever died from contact with a cane toad, these creatures provoke a strange bloodlust among Australians, who seem to take particular exception to their perceived ugliness. The authorities have set up fences, constructed traps and deployed pesticides, while ordinary citizens, urged on by scapegoat-seeking politicians, have come up with their

own extermination methods to combat the 'invaders'. Death comes in multiple guises in *The Conquest*, including freezing (apparently the most humane treatment), spearing, poisoning and simple whacking with golf clubs and cricket bats. One taxi driver reveals how he loves the squelching sound of toads under his tyres. Other interviewees explain how they have found unusual ways of profiting from these supposed pests: Queenslander Kevin Ladynski has created a 'travelling toad show' in which he displays stuffed and clothed specimens in various dioramas; another entrepreneur sells leather goods made from their skin. Elsewhere in the film, an environmentalist defends the rights of the toads not to be slaughtered and to "be themselves".

At times *The Conquest*, which has been praised by Werner Herzog for its "subversive humour", teeters on the edge of parody. Take the staged re-enactment in which Vicki and Michael Milton's beloved pet dog Wally is rushed to the vet after experiencing a bout of toad poisoning. We learn from the concerned Miltons how Wally's brain functions have since been seriously affected; there are even blurred images, photographed from the dog's perspective, to convey the hallucinogenic effects of ingesting the toad's toxin.

At least the digital 3D format allows the viewer to concentrate on the toads themselves in their natural habitats. Close-ups let us experience their mating rituals and their voracious appetites: one contributor describes them as "vacuum cleaners wandering around



One for the toad: 'Cane Toads: The Conquest'

SYNOPSIS The Democratic Republic of Congo, the present. Filmmaker Frank Poulsen investigates rumours that mobile-phone companies effectively finance the ongoing civil war through the use of 'blood minerals' obtained from Congolese mines in dubious circumstances. After negotiating various bureaucratic obstacles, Poulsen films appalling conditions in a mine in Bisie with the help of 16-year-old miner Chance. Poulsen visits Nokia's headquarters in Finland and is told that the firm has been aware of the issue since 2001 and is looking into it. Poulsen visits geologist Dr Frank Melcher, who demonstrates that it's possible to trace the source of these minerals, and talks to activists and politicians in London and Washington about effective ways of applying moral and legal pressure. In Finland, Pekka Isosomppi, Nokia's head of social responsibility, encourages Poulsen to raise awareness through his film.

trying to find food". We become aware of the textures and folds of their skin and their surprisingly shiny eyes, while the use of deep focus emphasises the imposing qualities of the Australian landscape.

What's missing, however, is any detailed analysis of the cane toads' impact on the ecosystem as they hop their way across the continent. To what extent has their 'conquest' (there are now reckoned to be now some 1.5 billion of them in Australia) come at the expense of other species or flora and fauna, and have they proved more destructive than other predators? A comparison with Jessica Oreck's recent *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* is instructive: whereas that film used a cultural and historical examination of Japan's fascination with insects to throw revealing light on contemporary Japanese society, Lewis's account, in its bluff tone and choice of 'quirky' participants, seems happier to fall back on traditional Aussie stereotypes.

Thomas Dawson

CREDITS

Produced by

Mark Lewis

Written by

Mark Lewis

Cinematography

Kathryn Mills

Paul Nichola

Toby Oliver

Editor

Robert DeMaio

Production Designer

Daniel C. Nyiri

Original Music

Composed by

Martin Armiger

Supervising Sound

Editor

Andrew Plain

©Screen Australia and

Radio Pictures

Production

Companies

Participant Media,

Discovery Studios and

Screen Australia

present a Radio Pictures

production

Developed with

assistance from New

South Wales Film and

Television Office

Produced in association

with ABC Television

Financed with the

assistance of Screen

Australia

Executive Producers

Jeff Skoll, Diane

Weyermann, Clark
Bunting

Dolby Digital
In Colour

3D

Distributor

Kaleidoscope Home
Entertainment

7546 ft +8 frames

Children of the Revolution

Ireland/United Kingdom/
Germany 2011

Director: Shane O'Sullivan

Shane O'Sullivan's documentary examines two people who threw off conventional stability and personal safety to pursue political goals, and explores the effect this had, and continues to have, on their now-adult children. The fact that all involved are women is kept low in the mix, but inevitably it's part of what intrigues: male rebels might through the ages have ditched domesticity in favour of burning causes, but convention still assumes that mothers will put their babies first. It swiftly becomes apparent that O'Sullivan's second-generation subjects – Bettina Röhl, one of two daughters of the German Red Army Faction member Ulrike Meinhof, and May Shigenobu, only child of Japanese Red Army founder Fusako Shigenobu – hold strikingly different views on their mothers' actions during the social tumult of the late 1960s. While Röhl reflects with steely disdain on Meinhof, her chaotic parenting and her radical cohorts, Shigenobu still lionises her mother, and assumes a beatific glow when speaking of her.

The gulf is fascinating. Perhaps Shigenobu, who was raised in Palestinian refugee camps amid her mother's allies, simply received better care than Bettina, who witnessed the decline of her parents' marriage, weathered an attempted kidnapping by the Red Army Faction as a child, and ultimately lost her mother to suicide. Perhaps national traditions play their part: although she didn't grow up in Japan, Shigenobu's refusal to criticise her mother noticeably honours the Japanese tradition of revering one's elders. (Indeed, the formality and politeness with which the Japanese interviewees discuss Fusako Shigenobu throughout the film is at intriguing odds with her devotion to armed resistance and thorough societal upheaval.) And perhaps, just perhaps May Shigenobu's sweetness and light are partly a media facade: she's a TV personality and news anchor in Japan now, with an interest in smoothing her mother's reputation.

If May Shigenobu gives little away, Röhl appears grateful for an opportunity to critique her mother's legacy – one that she feels has been unjustifiably romanticised within German youth culture. The experience of having radicals for parents has been widely explored in memoir, fiction and film, as has the ironic phenomenon whereby such children frequently turn out to be markedly conservative themselves – but Röhl's terse, only occasionally rueful discussion of her mother still serves as a shocking and poignant distillation of the personal legacy of perceived parental betrayal. Particular scorn is reserved for Baader Meinhof cultists who write to her



Cause and effect: May Shigenobu

expressing their admiration for her mother. "My direct connection to this is not that Ulrike Meinhof was my mother," Röhl declares. "My direct connection to the Red Army Faction is that they kidnapped us as children."

As probing as it is on certain points, the film falls somewhat short when it comes to clarifying the two groups' political objectives, beyond a nebulous sense of rebellion against imperialism. The interviewees are also, frustratingly, permitted to duck some key questions. What does the soignée, soft-voiced May really think about the bloody consequences of some of her mother's campaigns?

And if Bettina is certain, as she says, that her mother "went crazy" and had "a change in personality which none of us could comprehend", why did she block investigation into the possible physiological roots of Meinhof's behaviour?

These questions still hang as the film concludes – but perhaps they're still hanging for the subjects too. O'Sullivan's film is pertinent and thoughtful, distinguished by rare and rigorously sourced archive footage, and discreet presentation that sensibly eschews excessive visual bells and whistles or rebel-chic posturing.

Hannah McGill

CREDITS

Produced by

Shane O'Sullivan

Camera

Tokyo Crew,

Robin Probyn

Beirut Crew,

Bassem Fayad

German Crew,

Alex Schnepf

Editors

Ben Yeates

Fergal McGrath

Shane O'Sullivan

Original Score

Giles Packham

Sound

Tokyo Crew,

Steve Yasui

Beirut Crew,

Victor Bresse

German Crew,

Johannes Schmelzer

Ziringer

©Transmission Films

Production

Companies

Inish Film Board,

Westdeutscher

Rundfunk present a

Transmission Films

production

Developed with the

support of the Media

Programme of the

European Union

Executive Producers

Alan Maher

Christiane Hinz

Film Extracts

Alice in den Städten

(1974)

Kaette kita yopparai

(1968)

Kyōsō jōshi-kō (1969)

Seizoku (1970)

Shinjuku maddo (1970)

Sekigun-P.F.L.P. Sekai

sensō sengen (1971)
Tenshi no kōkatsu
(1972)

WITH

Bettina Röhl

May Shigenobu

interviewees

Erika Runge

university friend

Takaya Shiomi

Red Army leader

Masao Adachi

film director

Jutta Lack-Strecker

kindergarten nurse

Astrid Proll

ex-RAF member

Leila Khaled

freedom fighter

Bassam Abu Sharif

former PFLP leader

Kyoko Ohtani

Fusako Shigenobu's

lawyer

Professor Jürgen

Peiffer

pathologist at Meinhof

autopsy

In Colour/Black and

White

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

E2 Films

SYNOPSIS Using archive footage, the testimony of their contemporaries and interviews with their respective daughters, the film tells the stories of two women who became terrorists during the late 1960s.

Ulrike Meinhof, a divorced mother of twins working as a magazine editor in Hamburg, becomes involved with underground activists during the 1968 student protests. She suffers a brain tumour after her pregnancy; her friend Erika Runge, a psychotherapist, opines that the damage caused may have altered her personality. Meinhof meets Andreas Baader and Gudrun Esselin, and joins the Red Army Faction. She arranges for her daughters Bettina and Regine to be 're-educated' in Palestine, but they are intercepted in Sicily and returned to their father. Meanwhile in Japan, Fusako Shigenobu becomes active in the anti-Vietnam War movement while a student, and is instrumental in the founding of the underground leftist group the Japanese Red Army. Shigenobu goes to Palestine, and there has her daughter, May.

The activities of the JRA and RAF groups become increasingly bloody. Meinhof goes on the run but is caught, and commits suicide in prison. Shigenobu evades capture until May is at university; she denounces the JRA, but is given a 20-year sentence, which she is still serving.



The girl next door: Zoë Saldana

Colombiana

France 2011

Director: Olivier Mégaton

Certificate 15 107m 45s

Anyone who adopts the pseudonym Olivier Mégaton (he started life as Olivier Fontana) must either deal in atomic weapons or make high-octane, big-bang action movies. So it's perhaps lucky for us all that Mégaton chose the Michael Bay route. But even though it piles on the violence, frenetic editing, fight scenes, rooftop chases and gratuitous explosions expected of a modern-day kickass saga, and while Zoe Saldana (*Star Trek*, *Avatar*) in the lead role as assassin Cataleya emotes effectively and moves with a feline grace, *Colombiana* never manages to throw off the dead weight of its grindingly predictable by-numbers revenge plot. Predictability afflicts not only the narrative trajectory as a whole, but individual episodes within it: the moment we see the smug financial conman William Woogard (Sam Douglas) showing off the sharks in his glassed-in Caribbean pool, we know exactly what they'll next be having for lunch.

Still more tiresome is the laziness of the scripting. Plausibility, admittedly, is scarcely at a premium in this genre, but *Colombiana* repeatedly relies on laughably convenient coincidences to advance its plot. The sequence of events that leads to a picture of Cataleya falling into the hands of FBI agent Ross (Lennie James, channelling Denzel Washington) is contrived to the point of inanity. Responsibility for this lies squarely with producer and co-screenwriter (with his regular writing partner Robert Mark Kamen) Luc Besson; it's depressing to recall that, back before he turned himself into a trash-level production line, he was the writer-director of *Nikita* (1990) and *Léon* (1994), excursions into the genre that retained some degree of ingenuity and freshness.

Colombians, almost without exception, are portrayed as sweaty, unshaven, brutal criminals, only there to get blown away by the heroine; but in

a film of this type it would be absurd to complain about stereotyping. Saldana's performance (and that of a host of energetic stunt doubles) apart, *Colombiana*'s chief asset is a certain crude energy, making up in pace for what it lacks in subtlety. This has the drawback, though, of making the film's occasional moments of repose seem even flatter. In particular, the scenes involving Cataleya's affair with artist Danny (Michael Vartan from TV's *Alias*),

presumably intended to suggest that this ruthless killing-machine still retains a softer feminine side, just feel sappy. With its 15 certificate and copious shots of Saldana's lithe body clad in the skimpiest of tight-fitting costumes, *Colombiana* may well appeal successfully to its adolescent-male target audience. But as regards originality, intelligence or style, Mégaton has produced something of a bomb. **Philip Kemp**

CREDITS

Produced by
Luc Besson
Ariel Zeitoun
Written by
Luc Besson
Robert Mark Kamen
Director of Photography
Romain Lacourbas
Film Editor
Carmille Delamarre
Production Designer
Patrick Durand
Original Music
Composed, Arranged and Produced by
Nathaniel Mechaly
Sound Design
Frédéric Dubois
Costume Designer
Olivier Bériot

Stunt Supervisors
Alain Figlarz
Mechanical:
Michel Julienne

©EuropaCorp, TF1
Films Production, Grive
Productions
Production Companies
A EuropaCorp, TF1
Films Production, Grive
Productions co-
production with the
participation of Canal+
and Cinéma

CAST

Zoë Saldana
Cataleya
Jordi Mollà
Marco

Lennie James
James Ross
Amanda Stenberg
Cat aged 10
Callum Blue
Richard
Cynthia Addai-Robinson
Alicia
Jesse Borrego
Fabio
Ofelia Medina
Mama
Angel Garnica
Pepe
Sam Douglas
William Woodgard
Graham McTavish
Head Marshal Warren
Max Martini
Agent Robert Williams
Beto Benites
Don Luis

Michael Vartan
Danny Delaney
Cliff Curtis
Emilio Restrepo

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film
Distributors Ltd

9,697 ft + 8 frames

SYNOPSIS Bogotá, Colombia, 1982. Fabio Restrepo, bookkeeper to drugs baron Don Luis, announces that he wants to quit. They part affectionately; but Fabio, not deceived, prepares to flee with his wife and nine-year-old daughter Cataleya (named after an orchid). Don Luis's sidekick Marco and his gunmen kill Fabio and his wife. Cataleya swallows the microfiche her father gave her, stabs Marco in the hand and escapes. She delivers the microfiche to the US Embassy; a CIA agent escorts her to Miami, but Cataleya evades her and makes her way to Chicago to find her grandmother and hitman uncle Emilio. She tells Emilio she wants to be a killer. California, 15 years later. Cataleya, apparently drunk, crashes into a police car. Imprisoned, she gains access to the cell of drug-dealer Gennaro Rizzo and shoots him dead, drawing an orchid on his chest. FBI agent James Ross arrives to investigate this latest in a series of 22 killings. He detects a link to Don Luis, now living in Florida under CIA protection, but CIA agent Richard blocks his enquiries. Back in Chicago, Cataleya resumes her affair with artist Danny Delaney, who knows her as 'Jennifer'. Having collected fresh weapons from Emilio's associate Pepe and fed her two killer dogs, she flies to the Caribbean to dispose of Ponzi-scheme conman William Woogard.

A photograph Danny took of Cataleya shows up on the CIA computer and Ross identifies her as his quarry. Escaping from a SWAT team, Cataleya finds Emilio, Pepe and her grandmother killed by Don Luis's men. She breaks into Ross's apartment and tells him she'll kill his family unless he locates the drugs baron for her, then pressures Richard into giving Ross the information. In Florida, she attacks Don Luis's villa, killing his henchmen, and bests Marco in close combat before having her dogs devour Don Luis. Held in custody, Danny receives a phone call from Cataleya, hinting that he'll see her again.

Contagion

USA/United Arab Emirates 2011

Director: Steven Soderbergh

Certificate 12A 106m 15s

A convincing, epically distressful what-if badtime story if ever there's been one lately, Steven Soderbergh's new film is less a thriller per se – thrillers have procedural progression and problem-solving climaxes, after all – than a grim contemplation of a near-doomsday made conveniently possible only by the conveniences of 21st-century life. We've been warned repeatedly of the waste-laying pandemic made almost inevitable by our easy and frequent air travel and international shipping system, and now Soderbergh has shown us what that would look like, in often gruelling detail.

As such, there's a Luddite heart beating in the machinery; Gwyneth Paltrow's Patient Zero is a Minnesota wife and mom returning from a Hong Kong business trip and bringing a completely accidental new viral admixture with her, as if in retribution for the sins of our modern privileges. That she dallied during a Chicago stopover to cheat with an old boyfriend only makes the cosmic judgement more inescapable.

What would Jerry Falwell say? How you receive this thrust may depend on your age and attitude; viewers raised on atomised internet fluidity may smell a sermon, but if you're at all wary of today's unceasing lifestyle progression towards speed and narcissism, as I am, then *Contagion* has sharp subtextual teeth. Certainly, Soderbergh – arguably the contemporary industry's most adventurous calculator of audience reaction – knows how to laser-focus his film on the minutiae of viral transmittal, so that every doorknob and coffee cup becomes a fearsome tool of disaster. The first half, roughly, of the film is a merciless iron maiden of mysophobic anxiety, from Paltrow's very first offscreen cough (and the image of her dead scalp folded over her forehead in autopsy) to the *Andromeda Strain*-like scientific fact-finding, chillingly overwhelmed by an incurable disease too easily and quickly transmitted to track. Much of the film's redoubtable tension is delivered in the terrified eyes of the authority figures on hand, including bureaucrat Laurence Fishburne, field expert Kate Winslet, researcher Jennifer Ehle and disease investigator Marion Cotillard, each chin-deep in authentic techno-speak and growing more frozen by the minute, as the infection zones grow worldwide, the corpses begin to pile up and lawless panic descends on city centres.

Spread out among roughly six major story threads, the movie's pressurised qualm dissipates with time – how could this scalding scenario be resolved in a way that would match the cold rise of dread in its initial acts? Still, Jude Law's conspiracy-theorist blogger seems more or less irrelevant to the story's main arterial blast, and Cotillard's sleuth, trying to track down the plague's



Pandemic labyrinth: Kate Winslet

origins, is kidnapped by desperate Chinese villagers and disappears for too long. Matt Damon, as Paltrow's immune widower, brings his usual urgency to a one-dimensional role and makes it sing, particularly when he's edged all too tentatively into *Panic in Year Zero* territory. But in fact the film's ensemble structure unfortunately detracts from the time we'd rather spend with Winslet's bullshit-free self-sacrificer – her reaction shots to bureaucratic obstacles are so eloquent and sharp we can't help but want to know more about her – and Ehle's ultra-calm brainiac, who comes off as a virtual reincarnation of 1980s Streepian warmth and acuity. Soderbergh's primary agenda is

realism – even once a vaccine is manufactured, the lugubrious ways and means by which it is slowly delivered become the film's anti-climactic ordeal redux. Thus, *Contagion*'s lasting impact is visceral – if science-fiction narratives at their best electrify our comfort zones, then here is one of the most discomfiting films of recent times, and the furious upset it produces is at least a chastening, if not a prophecy. It's not a hard movie to pick apart after the fact, deciding which strands 'worked' and which didn't. But in its grip you're hard pressed to rest easy, and your reflexive attitude towards public coughing and common surfaces may take a beating.

Michael Atkinson

CREDITS

Produced by
Michael Sharnberg
Stacey Sher
Gregory Jacobs
Written by
Scott Z. Burns
Director of Photography
Peter Andrews
[i.e. Steven Soderbergh]
Edited by
Stephen Mirrone
Production Design
Howard Cummings
Music
Cliff Martinez
Production Sound Mixers
Mark Weingarten
Dennis Towns
Costume Design
Louise Frogley

Stunt Co-ordinators
Hong Kong:
R.A. Rondell
Chicago:
Rick LeFevour
San Francisco:
Rocky Capella

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Production Companies
A Warner Bros. Pictures presentation in association with Participant Media and Imagenation Abu Dhabi
A Double Feature
Films/Gregory Jacobs production
Executive Producers
Jeff Skoll
Michael Polaire
Jonathan King
Ricky Strauss

CAST

Marion Cotillard
Dr Leonora Orantes
Matt Damon
Mitch Emhoff
Laurence Fishburne
Dr Ellis Cheever
Jude Law
Alan Krumwiede
Gwyneth Paltrow
Beth Emhoff
Kate Winslet
Dr Erin Mears
Bryan Cranston
RADM Lyle Haggerty
Jennifer Ehle
Dr Ally Hextall
Sanaa Lathan
Aubrey Cheever

Dolby Digital/SDDS/
Datasat Digital Sound
In Colour

Prints by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros.
Entertainment UK Ltd

9,562 ft + 8 frames

The Dead

United Kingdom 2010
Director: Howard J. Ford
Certificate 18 104m 48s

In the wake of *28 Days Later...* (2002) and the *Dawn of the Dead* remake (2004), the zombie became the monster of choice in noughties horror, with filmmakers lining up to find new ways of making these rotten old shufflers interesting. Among the more striking examples, we have seen zombies exposed to romcom pastiche and smart satire (*Shaun of the Dead*, *Zombieland*), shakicam aesthetics (*Diary of the Dead*, *[REC]*), an alternative 1950s universe (*Fido*), Saussurean meltdown (*Pontypool*), banlieue anomie (*The Horde*) and even their own added perspective on longing (*Colin*). The zombies of the new millennium have also tended to be fast on their feet and fuelled by all manner of post-9/11 anxieties (the enemy within, viral rage, etc).

Amid such undead innovation, part of what makes *The Dead* so refreshing is its unabashed classicism, as admen brothers Howard and Jonathan Ford take their feature (which they have written, directed, edited, produced and shot) right back to the old school of George A. Romero. The Fords' zombies shuffle rather than run, slowly but surely, and, as in 1968's pioneering *Night of the Living Dead*, are never actually called 'zombies'. Meanwhile the sort of postmodern irony that has often taken over zombie flicks of the past decade is here precluded by a tone of intense, deadly earnest. One of the first lines spoken by American flight engineer Brian Murphy (Rob Freeman), as his evacuation plane runs out of fuel mid-air, is "we're all dead anyway" – and his fatalistic resignation ensures that a sense of doom pervades the film from its air-crash beginning to its wall-breach end. Here, all human effort seems futile in fending off the massed flesh-eaters, and Brian's journey is hopelessly circular – a point the film emphasises by opening near its end.

Not that *The Dead*, in its backward-looking disinterment of now outmoded zombie tropes, lacks all novelty. Its African setting, unusual to filmgoers (if not to players of *Resident Evil 5*), makes white middle-class Brian not just potential zombie fodder but also a stranger in a strange land, and his relationship with local militiaman Daniel Dembele (Prince David Osei), evolving from guarded suspicion to respect and friendship, reprises the tensions of *The Defiant Ones* (1958). Still, the Fords seem less concerned with the specificities of West Africa's sociopolitical situation than with a broader, somewhat hokey message about the brotherhood of humanity, and their film might equally have been set in any decent, exotic location.

Where *The Dead* really stands out from similar films, however, is obvious right from the opening shot of a tiny, isolated figure engulfed by a vast, shimmering desert landscape. Here never-before-seen locations in Ghana and Burkina Faso become the widescreen

stage for an apocalyptic odyssey. It is the sort of awe-inspiring epic vision that was once associated with David Lean or the filmmakers' (unrelated) namesake John Ford, and represents values of cinematic spectacle whose resurrection is always welcome.

Anten Bittel

CREDITS

Co-director
Jon Ford
Produced by
Howard J. Ford
Screenplay
The Ford Brothers
[i.e., Howard J. Ford,
Jon Ford]
Director of Photography
Jon Ford
Edited by
Howard J. Ford
Production Designer
UK Unit:
Daniel Gommé
Music Composed, Arranged and Recorded by
Imran Ahmad
Sound Designer
Andrew Wilkinson
Visual Effects
Dan Rickard

©Indelible Productions
UK Ltd
Production Companies
Indelible Productions
and Latitude Films
present a Ford Brothers film

Produced in association
with Latitude Films UK
Executive Producer
Amir Moallemi

CAST

Rob Freeman
Lieutenant Brian
Murphy
Prince David Osei
Sergeant Daniel
Dembele
David Dontoh
the chief
Ben Crowe
Dan Ryder, mercenary
leader
Glenn Salvage
suicide mercenary
Dan Morgan
James

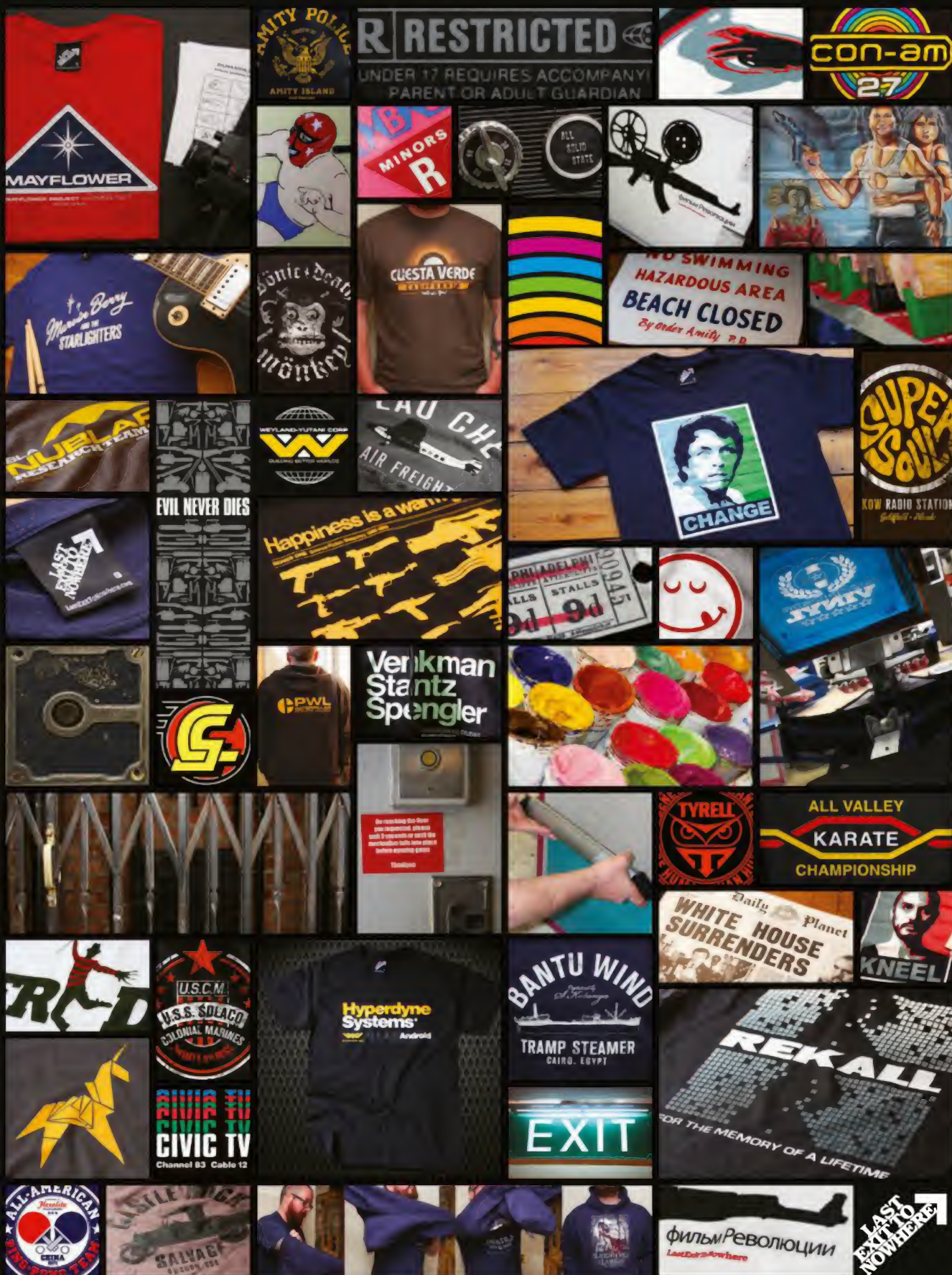
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Anchor Bay
Entertainment UK

9,432 ft + 0 frames

SYNOPSIS A war-torn West African state suffers a fast-spreading zombie outbreak. After the last US evacuation plane crashes into the sea, survivor Lieutenant Brian Murphy is determined to stay alive and get back to his wife and daughter in America. Under constant attack from zombies, he fixes a battered truck and hits the road. When the truck comes to a halt he is saved from zombies by Sergeant Daniel Dembele, a recently widowed deserter who is heading to a military base in the north, where he hopes to find his son. Daniel agrees, in exchange for the truck, to take Brian to the nearest airbase; when they find the airbase abandoned, the two men travel north together. With Brian febrile, they stop for supplies in a well-defended village, where the chief suggests that nature is punishing human arrogance and greed.

On the road again, Brian crashes the car in the darkness, and the men risk lighting a campfire. Daniel shows Brian a family talisman, which signifies hope and which he intends to pass down to his son. The men are attacked as they sleep, and Daniel is bitten. At Daniel's request, Brian shoots him in the head after he dies. Brian journeys on alone and finally arrives at the beleaguered northern base. There he fixes the radio and makes contact with the US, only to learn that the outbreak is worldwide and that there is little hope for his family. As zombies breach the compound, Brian heads out to await his end. Daniel's young son recognises the talisman around Brian's neck. Man and boy stand together.



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Dolphin Tale

USA 2011

Director: Charles Martin Smith
Certificate U 112m 30s

Boy meets dolphin in this by-the-book tale, which is boosted by its basis in a heartwarming true story. Winter the bottlenose dolphin became something of a celebrity a few years ago when she was the beneficiary of a prosthetic tail after being injured in a crab trap. The film inserts a number of stock clichés into her true-life story, including the cute lonely boy who bonds with her, a wounded veteran and a number of attractive marine hospital workers in wetsuits.

While the knowledge that Winter inspired many disabled visitors is inspiring, the film's narrative is fictionalised with a heavy hand as the handicapped are literally wheeled on to smile and shed a tear at the sight of a kindred spirit. Few parallels between human and dolphin aren't followed by a "See, they're just like us" comment. This doesn't credit young viewers with much intelligence.

That said, the three central performances are likeable and strong: Nathan Gamble as shy, lonely Sawyer, Cozi Zuehlsoff as his precocious new friend Hazel, and dolphin Winter as herself. It's Winter's presence that will undoubtedly be the film's biggest draw, and the 3D makes good use of the water scenes as dolphins swoop in and out of vision. Underwater cameras occasionally show Winter's POV, which heightens our identification with this frightened creature when she's poked and prodded by large groups of humans, albeit friendly ones.

When it comes to human actors, the main casting draw is Morgan Freeman as plain-speaking Dr McCarthy, who designs Winter's prosthetic tail and whose dry wit is in sharp contrast to the film's clumsy physical humour. The sight of Sawyer's single mother Lorraine (Ashley Judd) flailing around in panic at the sight of a pelican isn't an amusing one – nor believable, if we are to assume from her scrubs that she works in a hospital. Meanwhile the hint of a love-match between Lorraine and Harry

Connick Jr's widowed doctor is abruptly dropped, in what feels more like a cutting-room-floor job than an act of restraint from director Charles Martin Smith (whose acting credits, in films such as *The Untouchables*, remain more impressive than his directing ones). There's also a long scene with a remote-controlled helicopter going haywire, which appears to have been inserted merely to show off the 3D.

Helicopters, animals... *Dolphin Tale* has a good idea of what kids like but it doesn't deliver them in a sophisticated package. The limited locations (mostly a marine hospital and the outside of a houseboat) give it an almost claustrophobically parochial feel, and the simple narrative doesn't merit the running time. There's still enough to entertain young nature fans, but when real footage of Winter's rescue is shown at the end of the film, you can't help wondering if a documentary would have been both more informative and more moving.

◆ Anna Smith

CREDITS

Produced by
Andrew A. Kosove
Broderick Johnson
Richard Ingber
Written by
Karen Janszen
Noam Dromi
Director of Photography
Karl Walter Lindenlaub
Edited by
Harvey Rosenstock
Production Designer
Michael Corenbliith
Music
Mark Isham
Sound Mixer
Scott Clements
Costume Designer
Hope Hanafin

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Production Company
Alcon Entertainment
presents
Executive Producers
Robert Engelman
Steven P. Wegner

CAST

Harry Connick Jr
Dr Clay Haskett
Ashley Judd
Lorraine Nelson
Nathan Gamble
Sawyer Nelson
Kris Kristofferson
Reed Haskett

Cozi Zuehlsoff
Hazel Haskett
Morgan Freeman
Dr Cameron McCarthy
Austin Stowell
Kyle Connellan
Frances Sternhagen
Gloria Forrest
Austin Highsmith
Phoebe
Betsy Landin
Kat
Juliana Harkavy
Rebecca
Megan Lozicki
Brittany

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]
3D

Distributor
Warner Bros.
Entertainment UK Ltd

10,125 ft +0 frames



Night sweats: Katie Holmes

Don't Be Afraid of the Dark

USA/Mexico/Australia 2010

Director: Troy Nixey
Certificate 15 99m 6s

A high proportion of enquiries to 'what was the film where...?' columns turn out to be about 1970s made-for-TV horror movies – 'the one where the fetish doll chases Karen Black' (*Trilogy of Terror*), 'the one with the vampire in Las Vegas' (*The Night Stalker*), 'the one with the possessed bulldozer' (*Killdozer*). *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* (1973), directed by John Newland from a teleplay by Nigel McKeand, is 'the one with the whispering little creatures persecuting Kim Darby'. Before being seized upon by producer/co-writer Guillermo del Toro, the film inspired at least one de facto unauthorised remake (Kelly Sandefur's *Inhabited*, 2003). Though made under the strictures of network standards and practices, Newland's film remains a thoroughly nasty piece of work, and for all the much improved special effects and moments of dental abuse, this remake's creatures aren't as malicious as the lumpier monsters who wreck Darby's home, marriage and sanity.

Del Toro, co-writing with Matthew Robbins (director of 1981's *Dragonslayer* and 1987's **batteries not included*), reshapes McKeand's material so that it dovetails with his own cinematic universe. Kim Darby's protagonist/victim Sally was a young wife with no children, but Katie Holmes's Kim is shunted into the background until the climax to make

way for Bailee Madison's Sally, a modern-day American avatar of the heroine of *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006): the child of a broken marriage, estranged from parents and step-parents, brought unwillingly to a new, magical environment and lured underground by exotic creatures who want her to join their number. Del Toro also picks up on the influence of H.P. Lovecraft, drawing on elements from his short stories 'Pickman's Model' (especially as adapted on *Night Gallery*, a TV show contemporary with Newland's film), 'The Rats in the Walls' and 'The Lurking Fear', all of which deal with subterranean ghouls and devolved human beings. In linking the monsters with the tooth fairy, he even picks up on a theme from *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008).

Debut director Troy Nixey stages well the segue between quaintly inviting – it's hard to imagine an imaginative little girl not loving this house, with its sinister fairytale art direction – and outright horrific. A certain TV-movie plodding remains, especially in the subplot about the handyman who issues ominous warnings and becomes an early casualty. The dividing of the heroine's functions between Sally and Kim – along with the traditional kid-centred horror-movie practice of making adult characters dimwits – means the ending feels less ruthless than the 1973 version (here, a secondary character suffers the terrible fate Newland and McKeand gave their protagonist) and forces Holmes and Guy Pearce to play stooge to Madison, the precocious kid from *Just Go with It* (2011).

It's an enjoyably old-fashioned creepy-house monster picture, but the simpler, crueller 1973 film remains unmatched. ◆ Kim Newman

SYNOPSIS Clearwater, Florida, the present. Sawyer, an only child, lives with his mother Lorraine and idolises his cousin Kyle, a swimmer who has joined the army. Cycling on the beach, Sawyer is stopped by a man who has spotted a dolphin caught in a crab trap. They raise the alarm, and Sawyer cuts the dolphin free. A crew from Clearwater Marine Hospital arrives, including Dr Clay Haskett and his young daughter Hazel. They take the dolphin away.

The next day, Sawyer sneaks into the hospital and finds Hazel, who shows him the injured dolphin, a female named Winter. Winter responds well to Sawyer, so Dr Haskett allows him to make repeat visits. Winter's injured tail is removed and she has trouble swimming. Meanwhile it emerges that the hospital is likely to be bought by a rich developer. Lorraine is angry to discover that Sawyer has been skipping summer school to visit Winter, but is more encouraging after visiting the hospital.

Kyle is injured in action and returns to a military hospital. There, Sawyer meets Dr McCarthy, who constructs prosthetic limbs and who agrees to make a tail for Winter. Kyle visits Winter, and feels a connection with her. Winter's first artificial tail doesn't take, but the second does. Sawyer and Hazel persuade the staff to organise a fundraiser to save the marine hospital; the staff agree but secretly sign with the developer. A website monitoring Winter becomes a big success, and is popular with the developer and his children. The developer offers to fund the hospital for the foreseeable future.

CREDITS

Produced by
Guillermo Del Toro
Mark Johnson
Screenplay by
Guillermo Del Toro
Matthew Robbins
Based on the teleplay by
Nigel McKeand
Director of Photography
Oliver Stapleton
Edited by
Jill Bilcock
Production Designer
Roger Ford
Music
Marco Beltrami
Buck Sanders
Sound Designer
Rob MacKenzie
Costume Designer
Wendy Chuck
Visual Effects
Iloura

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Production Companies
Miramax and Guillermo Del Toro present in association with
FilmDistrict a Necropia/Gran Via production
Filmed with the assistance of Film Victoria
Executive Producers
Stephen Jones
William Horberg
Tom Williams

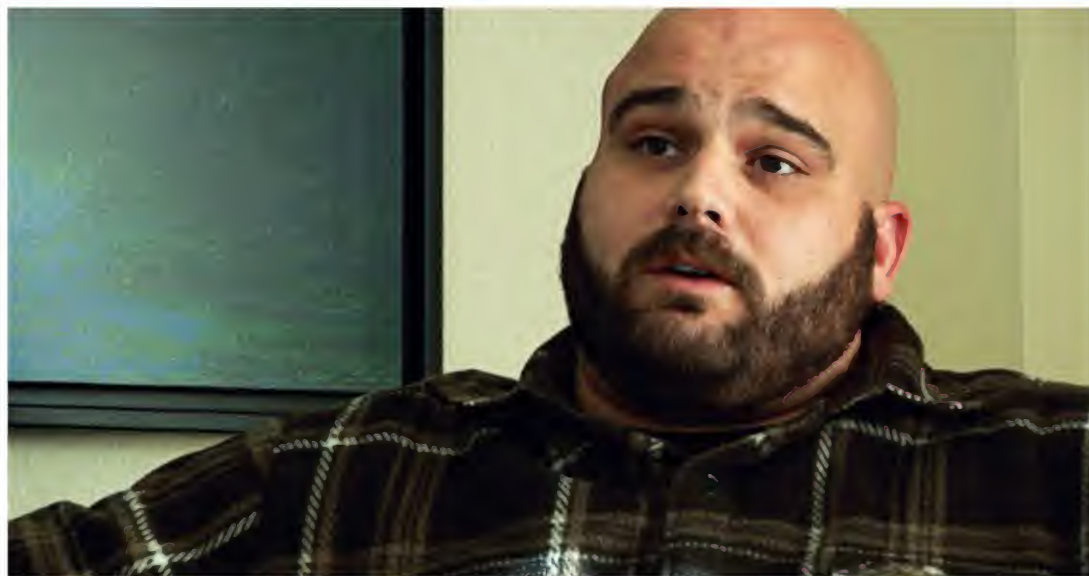
CAST

Katie Holmes
Kim

Guy Pearce
Alex
Bailee Madison
Sally
Jack Thompson
Harris
Bruce Gleason
buggy driver
Edwina Ritchard
housekeeper
Garry McDonald
Blackwood
Carolyn Shakespeare-Allen
airport car driver
Julia Blake
Mrs Underhill
David Tocci
workman
Lance Drisdale
policeman
Nicholas Bell
psychiatrist

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDDS
Colour and Prints by DeLuxe
International prints by Technicolor
[L.85:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited
8,919 ft + 0 frames



The war on error: Damien Corsetti

Four Days inside Guantanamo

Canada 2010

Directors: Luc Côté, Patricio Henríquez

A 16-year-old boy sits alone at a desk in a room, viewed in split screen from multiple angles on low-quality video. "Nobody cares about me," the boy whimpers, before breaking down in tears and repeating over and over the Arabic phrase for "Oh mother". His youthfulness, and his clear distress, make this almost unwatchable.

The boy is Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen who was captured in Afghanistan in 2002 and ended up in Guantánamo Bay, charged with killing US soldier Christopher Speer and providing material support for terrorism. He was the camp's youngest detainee, and the only minor ever to be accused (and subsequently convicted, as part of a 2010 plea bargain) of war crimes since they were first defined at Nuremberg. The footage was originally recorded in February 2003, as part of a four-day interrogation of Khadr conducted by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service with the help of the CIA – but the recordings have since been placed in the public domain in accordance with a 2008 ruling of the Canadian Supreme Court, and are now, in this compelling documentary from Patricio Henríquez (*Under the Hood, a Voyage into the World of Torture*) and Luc Côté (*Crash Landing*), reconfigured to serve as an indictment not of Khadr but rather of his interrogators and the ideology behind their work.

Dr Raul Berdichevsky, a Toronto psychiatrist specialising in the effects of torture, explains that the cameras were kept rolling throughout Khadr's isolated breakdown so that the interrogators, watching the sequence live from another room, could determine precisely when their subject

became most "vulnerable to the interrogation". However, Berdichevsky recontextualises the harrowing footage as evidence of "psychological abuse" resulting in Khadr's "total regression" – abuse which Gar Parry, retired Director General of the Consular Affairs of Canada, identifies as "a continuation of the torture that he was being subjected to". From such physical torture, endured over several months of detention at Bagram air base, Khadr had learnt to tell his interrogators exactly what he knew they wanted to hear – but when he retracted his vague tales of meetings with Osama Bin Laden and started nervously telling a rather different story, his interrogators showed no interest in listening ("You don't like the truth," Khadr tells them).

Yet as the deaf-eared questioning continues, Henríquez and Côté offer their own panel of expert witnesses (lawyers, politicians, UN workers, former detainees, etc) to interrogate the very legality of interviewing detainees without lawyers present, of treating minors as adults, of withholding the right to a civil trial, and of the Canadian government's prolonged refusal (in contravention of its constitution) to

demand the repatriation of its own citizen. Meanwhile, Canadian journalist Michelle Shephard and US Navy lawyer Lieutenant Commander William Kuebler (the latter privy, as Khadr's detailed military council, to secret photographs of the battle scene) argue that it was practically impossible for Khadr to have killed Speer, since he was lying face down and gravely injured at the time.

If this documentary uses the footage of Khadr's interrogation to turn the tables on those who originally recorded it, then it seems fitting that its most striking testimony should come from Damien Corsetti, a one-time US interrogator at Bagram (and later Abu Ghraib) and self-confessed "monster" who "did very bad things". That this man can end up credibly holding the moral high ground, and can claim that he has shown Khadr (whom he consistently treated well at Bagram) more compassion than Canada ever has, is proof positive of the topsy-turvy morality that has taken hold in the War on Terror, making victims of the innocent and accomplices of us all.

♦♦ Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Produced by
Luc Côté
Patricio Henríquez
Written by
Luc Côté
Patricio Henríquez
Filmed by
Luc Côté
Patricio Henríquez
Editing
Andrea Henríquez

Sound Editing
Claude Langlois

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Production Companies
Les Films Adobe
presents a production of
Les Films Adobe Inc.
produced in association
with D and Astral
Québec - Film and

Television Tax Credit
Canada – The Canadian
Film or Video
Production Tax Credit

**Dolby Digital
In Colour**
[L.7.1]

Distributor
Dogwoof Pictures

Onscreen title
**You Don't Like the
Truth**
**4 Days Inside
Guantánamo**

SYNOPSIS A documentary about the interrogation of Canadian citizen Omar Khadr, who was captured in July 2002 in Afghanistan and accused of killing a US soldier.

Aged only 15 when he was captured, and severely injured, Khadr was interrogated and tortured at Bagram air base, then transferred to Guantánamo Bay. Over four days in February 2003, two Canadian intelligence agents interrogated him. The interrogation was filmed, and in 2008 the video recordings were made available to Khadr's lawyers on the orders of the Canadian Supreme Court.

The film uses parts of these recordings with commentary from, among others, a psychiatrist specialising in the effects of torture, a former Canadian foreign minister, several former detainees of Bagram and Guantánamo, and a former US interrogator from Bagram.



Stealing a march: 'Hell and Back Again'

Hell and Back Again

USA/United Kingdom/
Germany 2010
Director: Danfung Dennis

In the field of the war documentary, sombre analyses crammed with well-informed talking heads are out; frenetic records of filmmakers getting right into the thick of it with soldiers are where it's at. Explicitly taking a side, à la Michael Moore, also seems to be losing favour. Films such as Sebastian Junger and Tim Hetherington's *Restrepo*, Janus Metz Pedersen's *Armadillo* and now Danfung Dennis's *Hell and Back Again* have garnered international plaudits for presenting the reality of the Afghan War from the soldiers' viewpoint, in a non-partisan manner that permits cheerleaders for the troops to swell with pride and doubters of the mission to see their disapproval vindicated.

Does it render them pointless, the ideological adaptability of these films – the fact that, Rorschach-blot-like, they tend to bring out whatever their viewer already thinks? No more pointless, arguably, than any war photography. If an image of a US soldier remonstrating with a bearded Afghan villager says 'American imperialism rampant' to you, than that's what you'll get from the film; if it says 'freedom being patiently extended to one who does not know how badly he wants it', then that's likely to be your take. Similarly, Nathan Harris – the seriously injured 25-year-old US Marine whom Dennis follows through his return home and painful, tedious, drug-fogged rehabilitation – is either a brave hero or a manipulated and exploited grunt. Either way, Harris is an awkward proposition: a 'hero' rendered impotent, depressed and drug-dependent; or a depleted embodiment of trigger-happy American machismo, missing the battlefield, playing with guns in an effort to recapture its thrills, and parroting rote maxims about bringing the Afghans American freedoms whether they like it or not. He's not comfortable to watch, but arguably he's necessary to contend with. If nations need armed forces,

then they need soldiers aggressive, unthinking and devoted enough to risk what happens to Nathan Harris – and what happens to the two other soldiers we see killed on camera here.

Dennis's film is effective in causing us to question what it is we want from soldiers. Would we like them to be cleverer than Harris? Less thrilled by destruction, more pensive, more poetic? Would we prefer that they didn't get horribly wounded, when that's precisely the risk they sign up for? Would we rather they exercised more judgement in choosing the conflicts they engage in, when that's precisely what they don't sign up for?

Less convincing is the film's effort to take us inside Harris's head by overlaying sounds of battle on to his pained daily life back home in North Carolina. There's no indication that this is based on testimony from Harris himself, and it feels both pat and intrusive; when he's talking to his doctor about his pain medication, why should the filmmakers assume or indicate that he's hearing gunfire over information to which one assumes he'd be very keen to pay attention? The legacy of his experience is carved deep into his body, and he talks constantly about Afghanistan in any case; further labouring of the point makes the film feel overcooked at times.

The war footage, shot on a jury-rigged Canon 5D Mark 2 stills camera, is crushingly effective and tense, and scenes of interaction between Afghan villagers and members of Harris's battalion capture poignantly the clash

of intentions and assumptions at play. ("We want to help you," insists a soldier; "Then why are you doing this to us?" an elder shoots back.) The scenes of Harris's life at home can seem too hammed for the camera, but this in itself shows us something about the emptiness of his life. This isn't a film that offers answers – and perhaps it ducks some of the questions, favouring the dramatic underlining of ironies and misfortunes over any firm political or ethical point – but it is a significant document of the tenor and cost of modern warfare, and Dennis is, unquestionably, a brave and talented photojournalist.

♥♥ Hannah McGill

CREDITS

Producers

Mike Lerner
Martin Herring
Danfung Dennis

Filmed by

Danfung Dennis

Edited by

Fiona Olway

Music

J. Ralph

Sound Design

J. Ralph

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Roast Beef Productions

Production Companies

Impact Partners
presents a Roast Beef
production in
association with
Sabotage Films &
Thought Engine,
Channel 4 Britdoc
Foundation
A film by Danfung
Dennis

Executive Producers

Dan Cogan
Karol Martesko-Fenster
Gernot Schaffler
Thomas Brunner
Havana Marking

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Independent
Distribution

The Help

USA/India/
United Arab Emirates 2011
Director: Tate Taylor
Certificate 12A 146m 4s

The Help is very moving entertainment. Fatuous sentiment delivering good tidings about our shared humanity (in this case, the sisterhood of women) without demanding anything more than admission price from the viewer usually is.

Set in Jackson, Mississippi, at the time of the assassination of civil-rights activist Medgar Evers, *The Help* betrays its attitude towards the era quite early on. When Emma Stone's aspiring writer Skeeter goes to the offices of the *Jackson Journal* looking for a job, the editor drops an offhand comment: "I guarantee you one goddamn day they're gonna figure out cigarettes can kill you." It's an easy laugh that lets the audience know they're off the hook, that they can position themselves safely outside the period. Of course, we know better now.

The editor is played, with eccentric individuality, by Leslie Jordan, one of several interesting faces populating *The Help*. Elsewhere, Octavia Spencer shows a wonderful rubberface expressivity as housemaid Minny; Jessica Chastain digs out the vulnerability beneath a va-va-voom, blouse-busting exterior; and Sissy Spacek has good, astringent readings in a small bit as the dotty mother of Bryce Dallas Howard's snobbish Hilly. But these are only glimmers of human verity in a film otherwise devoted to the steering of 'types' through the efficiently turned manoeuvres of an audience-flattering melodrama which allows the satisfying spectator experience of cheering on the historically vindicated winners in a 50-year-old moral struggle. The one noteworthy innovation in *The Help*'s version of the civil-rights awakening is its special emphasis on bodily functions, representative of the ugly truths that polite (that is, racist) society will not abide to have seen, as reflected in the fascist enforcement of bathroom segregation by caricatured housewife-horror Hilly with her 'Home Help Sanitation Initiative' (Howard spends the last reel with a cold sore, in-case-you-missed-it physical evidence of her internal rottenness). This also allows for some crowd-pleasing potty humour.

Tate Taylor, a journeyman actor turned writer-director, is credited with adapting Kathryn Stockett's 2009 bestseller. Given his film's swollen running time, it seems doubtful that he saw fit to prune any of Stockett's subplots in the translation to screen, though some – such as Skeeter's ill-starred courtship with Chris Lowell's dashing oil-rig hand, Minny's menacing by an offscreen abusive husband – are given such short shrift as to exist for purely strategic purposes, fresh hardships from the arsenal to be deployed whenever the tears threaten to dry.

At the most basic level, *The Help* is concerned with self-esteem. It takes



Are you being served?: Jessica Chastain, Octavia Spencer

place in an imperilled social system where, by long tradition, the upper caste of Southern whites reinforce their own insecure sense of worth through keeping Southern blacks in legalised second-class status. This is in contrast to the biracial co-authorship project through which Skeeter, Minny and her friend Aibileen and the other domestics of Jackson discover their voices and thus their own inherent value (royalties for their published book are, in progressive fashion, shared evenly between the participants).

The nurturing and rebirth of a sense of self-esteem is a fine subject – but *The*

Help's characters aren't identifiable as viable individuals beyond whatever presence the actors intrinsically lend them, so it's difficult to say the film is 'about' their journey so much as the experience the audience gets out of it. "I learned I could make children feel proud of themselves," Aibileen at one point says of her lifetime of raising white babies with self-help mantras, and *The Help* gives the audience a similar pampering. It's just the kind of easy, uplifting, look-how-far-we've-come accomplishment that makes the Academy feel proud of themselves.

◆◆ Nick Pinkerton

CREDITS

Produced by
Brunson Green
Chris Columbus
Michael Barnathan
Written for the Screen by
Tate Taylor
Based on the novel by
Kathryn Stockett
Director of Photography
Stephen Goldblatt
Editor
Hughes Winborne
Production Designer
Mark Ricker
Music
Thomas Newman
Re-recording Mixers
Scott Millan
David Giammarco

Costume Designer
Sharen Davis
@Dreamworks II
Distribution Co., LLC
Production Companies
Dreamworks Pictures
and Reliance
Entertainment present
in association with
Participant Media and
Imagination Abu Dhabi
a 1492
Pictures/Harbinger
Pictures production
Executive Producers
Mark Radcliffe
Tate Taylor
L. Dean Jones Jr
Nate Berkus
Jennifer Blum

John Norris
Jeff Skoll
Mohamed Mubarak Al
Mazrouei

CAST

Jessica Chastain
Celia Foote
Viola Davis
Aibileen Clark
Bryce Dallas Howard
Hilly Holbrook
Allison Janney
Charlotte Phelan
Chris Lowell
Stuart Whitworth
Sissy Spacek
Missus Walters
Octavia Spencer
Minny Jackson
Emma Stone
Skeeter Phelan

Cicely Tyson
Constantine Jefferson
Mike Vogel
Johnny Foote
Anna Camp
Jolene French
Aunjanue Ellis
Yule Mae Davis
Mary Steenburgen
Elaine Stein

Dolby Digital/Datasat
Digital Sound/SDDS
In Colour
[L85:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista
International (UK)

13,146ft +0 frames

The Ides of March

USA 2011

Director: George Clooney

Certificate 15 100m 46s

ALSO
SHOWING
AT THE
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FESTIVAL

After the underperforming *Leatherheads* (and you can't help wondering why anyone makes movies about

American football when not even US audiences seem that interested), George Clooney returns to what he knows best: politics. Adapted from *Farragut North*, a 2008 stage play by Beau Willimon (Farragut North being a subway station in the downtown lobbyist district of Washington DC), *The Ides of March* makes a timely arrival as liberal disillusionment with Barack Obama comes to a head. All the backstabbing and skulduggery we see is Democrat-on-Democrat; the Republicans are present only as occasionally invoked offscreen bogeymen. "I've seen too many Democrats bite the dust because they wouldn't get down in the mud with the fucking elephants," remarks campaign aide Tom Duffy (Paul Giamatti); though on the evidence presented, the Democrats themselves are scarcely averse to dirty tricks.

As usual (*Leatherheads* apart), Clooney takes a secondary role in his own movie. His Governor Mike Morris is presented as the left-liberal dream candidate – anti-death penalty, pro-choice, anti-oil, against overseas aggression, refusing to play the God card. "I'm not a Christian, I'm not an atheist. I'm not a Muslim, I'm not a Jew. My religion is a piece of paper – the Constitution of the United States of America," he tells a wildly cheering crowd. But the focus of the action falls on the behind-the-scenes staff: Morris's campaign manager Paul Zara, cynical but principled (Philip Seymour Hoffman), and his opposite number Tom Duffy, cynical and unscrupulous. And, batted between them, the ambitious young Stephen Meyers (Ryan Gosling), tracing a downward trajectory

from idealism ("It's the right thing to do – and nothing bad happens when you're doing the right thing") to the depths of corruption. "He's a politician," Marisa Tomei's reporter warns him about Morris. "He will let you down, sooner or later." But – and here's where the title comes in – it's Stephen who commits the worst betrayal. By the end of the film he's callously blackmailing the man he so recently hero-worshipped.

Like all the best American political movies – *Advise & Consent* (1962), *The Best Man* (1964), *The Candidate* (1972) – Clooney's film plumbs the gulf between the public statements of high-flying aspiration and the messy, sordid world of backroom deals and personal fallibility. "Every time I draw a line in the sand, they move it," complains Morris (words Robert Redford's character in *The Candidate* might have used), but in the end all the lines have been swept away and Morris, under Stephen's calculating gaze, is horse-trading with a man whose venality and lack of principle he despises.

Around midway through, with the introduction of a thread involving vulnerable young intern Molly (Evan Rachel Wood), *The Ides of March* switches register from political drama to political thriller. This allows some shrewd sideswipes at the narrowness of American public morality – "You can lie, you can cheat, you can start a war, you can bankrupt the country, but you can't fuck the interns" – but it's also the point at which the film starts losing its cutting edge and heading for a conclusion that, while suitably downbeat, feels a touch less audacious than its first half led us to anticipate.

Even so, this is a handsome, intelligently written movie that never feels like a filmed play or talks down to its audience. Clooney directs with assurance and a welcome absence of flashy camerawork, creating a convincingly detailed and cluttered atmosphere of the workings of a political campaign, and giving rich opportunities to a superb ensemble cast. In the end, *The Ides of March* has a good deal in common with the candidacy of Governor Mike Morris – not quite as outstanding at it seemed at first, but still way ahead of most of the competition.

◆◆ Philip Kemp



Primaries school: Philip Seymour Hoffman, George Clooney

SYNOPSIS Jackson, Mississippi, 1963. Eugenia 'Skeeter' Phelan comes home from university and reconnects with her old classmates – girls who gave up studying to start families. An aspiring author, Skeeter takes a job writing a housekeeping column for the *Jackson Journal*. Picking up tips from her friends' black housemaids, Skeeter pitches an idea for a book to New York publishers – a forum for the domestics to speak out about their experiences. Skeeter recruits Aibileen, a black nanny who has spent her life caring for white children; Minny, a renowned cook recently fired by Skeeter's snobbish friend Hilly, also joins the project. Minny finds work with Johnny and Celia Foote; the latter is snubbed by Hilly's set as arriviste 'white trash'. Skeeter, Aibileen, Minny and Celia get together to discuss their travails, while Hilly plots their ostracism.

Skeeter's book is published anonymously. Skeeter leaves home for a publishing job in New York. Aibileen quits domestic service to pursue literary ambitions of her own.

CREDITS

Produced by
Grant Heslov
George Clooney
Brian Oliver
Screenplay
George Clooney
Grant Heslov
Beau Willimon
Based on the play
Farragut North by Beau Willimon
Director of Photography
Phedon Papamichael
Edited by
Stephen Mirrone
Production Designer
Sharon Seymour
Music
Alexandre Desplat
Sound Mixer
Edward Tise
Costume Designer
Louise Frogley

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Production Companies
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Executive Producers
Nigel Sinclair
Guy East
Stephen Pevner

Leonardo DiCaprio
Jennifer Kiloran
Todd Thompson
Nina Wolarsky
Barbara A. Hall

CAST

Ryan Gosling
Stephen Meyers
George Clooney
Governor Mike Morris
Phillip Seymour Hoffman
Paul Zara
Paul Giamatti
Tom Duff
Marisa Tomei
Ida Horowicz
Jeffrey Wright
Senator Thompson
Evan Rachel Wood
Molly Stearns
Max Minghella
Ben Harper
Jennifer Ehle
Cindy Morris
Michael Mantell
Senator Pullman
Gregory Itzin
Jack Stearns

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDSS
Colour/Prints by DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E! Films

9,069 ft + 0 frames



Superwoman: Sarah Jessica Parker

I Don't Know How She Does It

USA 2011

Director: Douglas McGrath

Certificate 12A 89m 25s

"I love being the mother of a two-year-old – it's like being a movie star in a world without critics." So says Kate (Sarah Jessica Parker) in a pre-emptive strike against the inevitable criticism of this bland adaptation of Allison Pearson's 2002 novel. It's one of many little sayings Kate indulges in throughout her overbearing narration, as she struggles to juggle work, husband and kids. "Trying to be a man is a waste of a woman," is the conclusion, though it's not a plea for stay-at-home motherhood: Kate merely cuts down on her working hours to spend more time with her children.

It does seem close to a plea for compulsory parenthood, however. Kate's assistant Momo (Olivia Munn) is a robotic workaholic who swears she'll never have children but decides

to keep an unplanned baby after a garbled pep talk from Kate. Thus while frequently generalising about men's inadequacies, the film also undermines women in its depiction of Momo's sudden capitulation, which immediately leads to her to becoming both kinder and less efficient ("The pregnancy did something to my brain," she moans). In this world, women can't bring up children and do their jobs properly: stressed-out Kate frequently makes embarrassing gaffes at work – and while these may aid audience identification, they're rarely funny. *I Don't Know How She Does It* is adept at identifying the common complaints of the busy working mother but it doesn't do so subtly, stating rather than demonstrating its points, using narration and mock-interviews with the supporting characters – a device that muddles the tone further.

The performances are fine: Pierce Brosnan and Greg Kinnear are likeable as boss and husband respectively, while Parker looks more at home on the big screen than she has in years. But the actors aren't given any drama to work with: the threadbare plot hinges on a mild flirtation that's easily forgiven; comic set pieces revolving around an attack of head lice and a

mistakenly delivered email are lightly amusing but heavily predictable.

If director Douglas McGrath (*Infamous*) was hoping Aline Brosh McKenna would bring a little of her *The Devil Wears Prada* magic to the screenplay, he must have been disappointed. This plays out more like a long episode of a TV series: *Sex and the City* without the sex and frocks, but with added child puke. At least in that series (if not the films) Parker told viewers what they already knew with a degree of wit and panache. Mothers may start this film nodding in agreement but end it feeling thoroughly patronised.

♦♦ Anna Smith

CREDITS

Produced by
Donna Gigliotti
Screenplay
Aline Brosh McKenna
Based upon the novel by Allison Pearson
Director of Photography
Stuart Dryburgh
Editors
Camilla Toniolo
Kevin Tent
Production Designer
Santo Loquasto
Music
Aaron Zigman
Sound Mixer
William Sarokin
Costume Designer
Renée Ehrlich Kalfus

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Production Companies
The Weinstein Company presents
Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development
Executive Producers
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein
Aline Brosh McKenna
Scott Ferguson

CAST

Sarah Jessica Parker
Kate Reddy
Pierce Brosnan
Jack Abelhammer

Greg Kinnear
Richard Reddy
Christina Hendricks
Allison Henderson
Kelsey Grammer
Clark Cooper
Seth Meyers
Chris Bunce
Olivia Munn
Momo Hahn
Jane Curtin
Marta Reddy
Mark Blum
Lev Reddy
Busy Philipps
Wendy Best
Sarah Shahi
Janine LoPietro
Jessica Szohr
Paula

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

8,047 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS

Present-day Cincinnati. In a close-fought Democratic primary, Mike Morris, the liberal governor of Pennsylvania, has a narrow lead over his rival, Senator Pullman. Behind the scenes, Morris's chief aide Paul Zara and his press secretary Stephen Meyers are closely watching the figures – as is Pullman's chief aide Tom Duffy. *New York Times* reporter Ida Horowicz warns Stephen that his view of Morris may be starry-eyed. While Paul is away trying to win over Senator Thompson of North Carolina, who controls a crucial block of votes, Stephen is invited to a secret meeting by Duffy.

Duffy tells Stephen that Thompson has been won over to Pullman's camp by being promised the job of Secretary of State if Pullman becomes president, and invites Stephen to join their team. Stephen indignantly refuses, and tells Paul about the meeting. Paul is furious. Stephen starts an affair with Molly Stearns, an attractive young intern; one night she receives a call from Morris and confesses that she had a one-night stand with him and is now pregnant. Stephen finds money for an abortion by dipping into campaign funds. Ida tells Stephen she knows about his meeting with Duffy.

Stephen drives Molly to a clinic, promising to pick her up afterwards. Paul sacks Stephen, saying it was he who tipped off Ida. Stephen goes to Duffy, who tells him he's now tainted goods and no longer useful. Molly, having vainly waited for Stephen, returns to her hotel and takes an overdose. Stephen confronts Morris, claiming he has a compromising note from Molly, and demands that he is given Paul's job and that Morris does a deal with Thompson. Morris capitulates. Paul is sacked, Thompson endorses Morris, and Stephen takes over as Morris's campaign manager.

SYNOPSIS

Boston, the present. Kate Reddy is married to architect Richard. They have two children, Emily and Ben, who are largely cared for by a nanny. Kate works as an investment manager for a financial firm and travels frequently. Friends and colleagues comment on her busy life in vignettes to camera.

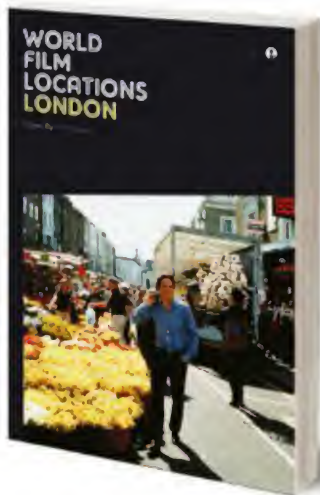
Kate begins working on a pitch for a new investment fund with her company's boss, widower Jack Abelhammer, in New York; with Richard busy on a high-profile commission, they rarely see one another. Kate and Jack grow close. Kate's assistant Momo, who had previously vowed that she would never have children, falls accidentally pregnant; Kate urges her to consider keeping the baby. Kate has to abandon a family weekend to pitch the investment fund to a client. Momo decides to keep the baby. Kate is called home when Ben is taken to hospital. He quickly recovers but Richard is annoyed that Kate was hard to reach. As snow looms, Kate promises Emily that they'll make a snowman together.

Kate's Boston boss Clark Cooper asks her to go on a work trip at the weekend; she refuses in order to spend time with her family. As Kate leaves the office, she sees Jack, who tells her they won the deal and that he is falling for her. She rejects him gently and, seeing the snow falling, goes to make a snowman with Emily and reunites with Richard. Months later, Momo has the baby.

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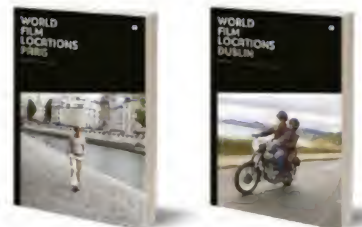
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Johnny English Reborn

United Kingdom/USA/France 2011
Director: Oliver Parker
Certificate PG 101m 18s

It's been eight years since Peter Howitt's *Johnny English* – a spy-spoof vehicle for Rowan Atkinson spun off from a series of credit-card TV commercials – came and went, but there was evidently thought to be enough life in the character for this tardy redux. Given that the super-spy boom initiated by *Dr No* in 1962 has been prompting as many spoofs as serious entries almost from the beginning, this terrain feels extremely well travelled, and Atkinson's Johnny English has to struggle somewhat to find his own identity amid so many other mock agents.

It doesn't help that so much of the material is second-hand. An extended riff in which Johnny mistakes his boss's mother for a disguised assassin and batters the helpless old lady in the presence of her adoring family (this time, Gillian Anderson gamely plays the M role) is lifted wholesale from a much briefer gag in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997), while the plotline of the inept hero's nemesis turning out to be the more obviously heroic fellow agent who is his role model is frankly misappropriated from the film of *Get Smart* (2008). Even the slapstick gadgets demonstrated and misused in MI7's proving laboratories aren't that different from the ones devised by Q in middling 007 entries,

while the story lacks the level of fond attack on genre conventions which make the recent *OSS 117* skits with Jean Dujardin so fresh.

The closest this gets to satire comes with a suggestion that British intelligence is now a blandly corporate subsidiary of Toshiba, and Johnny's refusal to believe that the characterless, earnest politician (Stephen Campbell Moore) at the conference table is the prime minister, but it refrains from anything that might be construed as criticism of the actual conduct of the intelligence services in the past decade.

Atkinson's Johnny is at once arrogant after the manner of Blackadder and pathetic like Mr Bean, but isn't a terribly engaging character – and the film never quite settles on whether or not his spell in a Tibetan monastery hauling rocks with a rope clenched between his buttocks has turned him from a blundering idiot into a competent secret agent. A promising routine, with a touch of Tati, has a minor baddie make an escape across the rooftops of Hong Kong using energetic parkour moves – only for Johnny blithely to follow by conventional means (opening doors, using lifts, squeezing through gaps sideways) and effortlessly keep pace. It is possible to be dextrous and funny, but Atkinson and director Oliver Parker – the latter porting in from the similarly parochial *St Trinian's* films – don't quite trust that approach and keep falling back on Johnny acting like a total idiot whenever it seems he has the upper hand. The film is most successful as a children's movie: young audiences are liable to keep laughing at running jokes about kicks to the balls or throwing cats out of windows long after adults have stopped tittering. **Kim Newman**

Midnight in Paris

Spain/USA 2011
Director: Woody Allen
Certificate 12A 94m 3s

Midnight in Paris's opening sequence, a mobile postcard gallery of the city's charms, plays out under all four minutes of the keening Sidney Bechet clarinet piece 'Si tu vois ma mère'. Not only is the track most commonly known in English as 'I Remember When', making it perfect for a film about the uncanny power of nostalgia, but Bechet was an American in Paris in the 1920s – exactly the situation the movie's main character, Owen Wilson's struggling writer Gil, unexpectedly finds himself in when a midnight cab ride whisks him back in time to the company of Cole Porter, the Fitzgeralds and sundry other denizens of the Jazz Age. It's a double throwback, offering both a dreamy vision of the Lost Generation and a conscious return to jazzy, time-hopping Woody Allen baubles of the past.

Such sustained ogling of a picturesque city can't help but recall the rhapsodic overture to *Manhattan* (minus Allen's ever-modulating voiceover), which somehow knitted together New York's whole history and erupted in orgasm. Downscaled, this feels infinitely more modest, and a bit more tired: Allen isn't aiming for transcendence but giving us a neat little

thesis on nostalgic relativity, using a similar means of whimsical transport to the one in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985). In this case jumping periods using a magic old Peugeot cab, the movie unearths its takeaway kernel of thought when we wind up in the Maxim's of the Belle Époque, only to find Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas and co dissatisfied with their era, and amazed that visitors to the 1920s demimonde could view it through such a rose tint. Only by grasping the fact that contentment is always backward-looking can the time-travelling Gil set aside fantasy and learn to make do with the here and now.

Except, this being latter-day Allen, the here and now aren't strictly recognisable, but constitute just another form of fantasy, making it hard to accept the film as a farewell to nostalgic sentiment: it's more of an indulgent faux-farewell. Allen's period Paris is a glowing hangout in many ways, with Darius Khondji's seductive lighting affording easily the most visual pleasure in an Allen movie since *Sweet and Lowdown* (1999), and showcasing some splendid cameos. Corey Stoll's hilariously gruff Ernest Hemingway takes top honours, with Adrien Brody's flamboyantly deranged Salvador Dalí a close second. It's hard to resist the scene where Gil tries to explain his predicament to Dalí, Man Ray and Luis Buñuel, only to meet with a collective shrug. "Yes," he replies, exasperated, "but you're surrealists!"

The problems are mainly in real, modern Paris, which isn't modern or real. We swan around with the exceptionally wealthy, shopping



Deconstructing Páree: Carla Bruni, Owen Wilson

SYNOPSIS Paris, the present. Gil, an unemployed Hollywood screenwriter working on his first novel, is holidaying with his fiancée Inez prior to their wedding. One night, the bored Gil breaks away from their group and goes for a midnight stroll. An old-style cab picks him up and whisks him into the demimonde of the late 1920s, where Cole Porter is playing his own songs at the piano. Gil meets Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and is introduced to Ernest Hemingway, who offers to pass on the latest draft of Gil's book to Gertrude Stein. Leaving to fetch it, Gil immediately finds himself back in the present day.

On subsequent nights, Gil sneaks away from Inez and her ultra-conservative parents, using the cab to meet artistic celebrities including Stein and Picasso; he falls in love with the latter's model/mistress Adriana.

Spending more and more time apart from Inez during the day, Gil meets antiques dealer Gabrielle at a flea market. Inez's father hires a private detective to follow Gil on his nightly jaunts. Gil and Adriana travel even further back into Belle Époque Paris, where he leaves her to fulfil her dream of being a costume designer. Resolving to live and work in present-day Paris, Gil breaks with Inez after she admits she's been sleeping with her pretentious friend Paul; he has a chance encounter at midnight with Gabrielle.

CREDITS

Produced by
Tim Bevan
Eric Fellner
Chris Clark
Screenplay
Hamish McColl
Story
William Davies
Director of Photography
Danny Cohen
Editor
Guy Bensley
Production Designer
Jim Clay
Music
Ilan Eshkeri
Production Sound

Mixer
Mark Holding
Costume Designer
Beatrix Pasztor
Stunt Co-ordinator
Paul Herbert

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Production Companies
Universal Pictures
presents in association
with StudioCanal and
Relativity Media a
Working Title
production
Executive Producers
Debra Hayward
Liza Chasin
William Davies

CAST

Rowan Atkinson
Johnny English
Gillian Anderson
Pamela Thornton,
'Pegasus', Head of MI7
Dominic West
Simon Ambrose, 'Agent
One'
Rosamund Pike
Kate Sumner
Daniel Kaluuya
Tucker
Richard Schiff
Titus Fisher
Tim McInnerny
Quartermain
Pik-Sen Lim
the Killer Cleaner

Stephen Campbell Moore
Prime Minister
Burn Gorman
Slater
Togo Igawa
Ting Wang
Mark Ivanir
Karlenko

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International (UK)

9,117 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Titus Fisher, a rogue CIA agent, contacts British intelligence agency MI7, claiming to have information about a plot to kill the Chinese premier during talks with the prime minister. Fisher will only tell more to Johnny English, an MI7 agent in disgrace since his failure to save the premier of Mozambique from an assassin. Pamela Thornton, aka Pegasus, head of MI7, authorises Johnny's return to service, and he is reunited with his old associates Simon Ambrose, a suave and competent agent, and Quartermain, a gadget-master. Johnny is also introduced to Kate Sumner, a behavioural psychologist, and trainee agent Tucker. In Hong Kong, Fisher admits to Johnny that he is part of Vortex, a three-man international assassination cartel responsible for the Mozambique hit. Fisher is killed by a Chinese cleaning lady. Johnny tracks down Karlenko, the second member of Vortex, but Karlenko is killed on the orders of the third member – Ambrose, who frames Johnny as the would-be assassin. Johnny escapes from MI7 and takes refuge with Kate, who believes in him, and Tucker. Johnny and Tucker infiltrate the Swiss mountaintop retreat where the Chinese premier and the prime minister are meeting. Johnny accidentally takes the mind-control drug Vortex used to turn trusted allies into assassins. Ambrose orders Johnny to kill the premier, but he overcomes the drug by force of will and foils the plot, preventing Ambrose's escape by shooting a missile at a cable car. Johnny's knighthood is reinstated.

for jewellery or browsing flea markets so ludicrously chic that the fleas have, well, fled. This is the kind of Paris where Carla Bruni (who's perfectly fine) plays a romantically available museum guide who winds up as Gil's third choice, behind the exquisite figments played by Marion Cotillard and Léa Seydoux. In the role of his uptight fiancée, Rachel McAdams is stuck with a character so prissy and belittling it's impossible to believe them as a couple, and *In the Loop's* Mimi Kennedy is another disappointing casualty of lax screenwriting as her toxic, Tea Partyist mother.

Even so, there's enough wit and inspiration here to hoist the film up to par – it's certainly more on the level of a semi-successful *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008) than a sulphurous *Whatever Works* (2009). Wilson carries it with a befuddled charm rare in Allen's leading men lately, and handles the name-dropping with a comic verve that depends precisely on him not being your familiar Allen type – in few other contexts could you imagine him saying "Prufrock's like my mantra!" or, "It didn't take Gauguin long to start steaming in!" The idea of collaring Buñuel to suggest the premise of *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) yields a choice moment when he's totally perplexed about the logistics, but the best joke is charmingly conceptual, economically established, and pays off with a *mise en abyme* Charlie Kaufman would relish: it involves a private detective, and I won't give it away. However else it grabs you, *Midnight in Paris* might prompt nostalgia for the last Woody Allen film with a punchline worth conserving.

♦♦ Tim Robey

CREDITS

Produced by
Letty Aronson
Stephen Tenenbaum
Jaume Roures
Written by
Woody Allen
Director of
Photography
Darius Khondji
Editor
Alisa Lepseller
Production Designer
Anne Seibel
Supervising Sound
Editor
Robert Hein
Costume Designer
Sonia Grande

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Production Companies
Mediapro, Versátil Cinema & Gravier Productions present a Pontchartrain production

With the collaboration of Televisió de Catalunya
With the support of ICAA - Instituto de Cinematografía y Artes Audiovisuales (Gobierno de España, Ministerio de Cultura), Institut Català de les Indústries Culturals - Generalitat de Catalunya, Catalan Films & TV
This film has benefited from the tax credit for foreign film production in France

Executive Producer
Javier Méndez

CAST

Kathy Bates
Gertrude Stein
Adrien Brody
Salvador Dalí
Carla Bruni
museum guide
Marion Cotillard
Adriana
Rachel McAdams
Inez
Michael Sheen
Paul
Owen Wilson
Gil
Nina Arianda
Carol
Kurt Fuller
John
Tom Hiddleston
F. Scott Fitzgerald
Mimi Kennedy
Helen
Alison Pill
Zelda Fitzgerald
Léa Seydoux
Gabrielle
Corey Stoll
Ernest Hemingway

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros.
Entertainment UK Ltd

8,464 ft +4 frames

Miss Bala

Mexico/USA 2011

Director: Gerardo Naranjo

Certificate 15 112m 49s

ALSO
SHOWING
AT THE
LONDON
FILM
FESTIVAL

With drug trafficking in Mexico turning over billions of dollars every year and causing thousands of deaths in the process,

it's no surprise that anger is the overriding emotion of Gerardo Naranjo's fast and furious thriller *Miss Bala*, which tackles these longstanding, intractable problems head-on. Set just on the Mexican side of the troubled border with the US, the film centres on fresh-faced, working-class Laura, who enters a local beauty contest in the hope of earning some cash to help out her poverty-stricken father and brother, but ends up instead being sucked into a horrifying vortex of violence and corruption, which Naranjo traces right to the pinnacle of the Mexican state.

Finding herself in the wrong place at the wrong time, Laura is forced against her will to carry out the instructions of gang members, until she begins to resemble a passive doll being dressed up (sometimes literally) to perform a variety of roles – drugs mule, beauty queen, unwilling heroine – complete with her own blackly comic name ('Miss Bala' translates as 'Miss Bullet'). The use of a beauty contest as governing metaphor and plot device is inspired – though admittedly it loses some traction towards the end – and suggests a mocking, bitter irony on Naranjo's part towards a world ruled by corrupt men on both sides of the border, where Laura's only escape lies in buying into the sexism which so disfigures her everyday life – and which proves just as damaging as the criminals she's dealing with.

Newcomer Stephanie Sigman gives a steely, reined-in performance as Laura, managing to make her character credible despite the increasingly ludicrous situations she's launched into – this is a thrill-ride with more twists and turns than a Tarantino film. But Naranjo astutely relegates speed and violence to second place – the sounds of the bullets that constantly surround Laura like a halo of buzzing mosquitoes

SYNOPSIS Mexico, the present. Twenty-three-year-old Laura lives near the US border, and sells shirts for a living. Along with her friend Suzu, she decides to enter a beauty contest in the hope of winning some much needed money. At a party, the two young women solicit the help of corrupt DEA agents to get into the contest, but are caught up in a violent hit being carried out by a local drug gang, which leaves almost everyone at the party dead. Laura hides but is spotted by Lino, the gang's leader. She escapes, and asks a police officer to help her find Suzu – but he takes her straight to Lino; the latter offers to find Suzu in exchange for Laura's help. Lino arranges Laura's participation in the beauty contest. Laura tries to escape but is forced to become more involved in the gang's drug- and arms-trafficking activities in order to protect her father and brother. She wins the beauty contest; after she's crowned, she is expected to have sex with the president – whom Lino and his gang apparently want to kill. Laura is wired up with a microphone and told to give a signal to Lino at the appropriate moment. It transpires that the president is colluding with Lino and his gang; the bogus assassination attempt is calculated to make it seem as if Lino has been killed during its execution. Laura learns that Suzu is dead. Laura is accused on television of being one of the gang members plotting against the president. She is handcuffed and taken away in a police van, which stops outside the city; she is set free.



Drug queen: Stephanie Sigman

often emerge from outside the frame. This gives *Miss Bala* a pronounced three-dimensionality and helps to emphasise Laura's vulnerability and disorientation – not to mention enhancing the narrative's unpredictability.

What stops the film being unwatchably chaotic is the confident grip of cinematographer Mátyás Erdély, whose analytical gaze is in stark contrast to the hectic, often unfocused camera that tracked the two teenage protagonists of Naranjo's much lauded 2008 feature *I'm Gonna Explode*. In *Miss Bala*, our attention is trained on Laura's every move, enabling Naranjo to create a few quiet oases in the midst of the madness. Erdély shoots them in richly detailed contemplative takes which perfectly capture Laura's loneliness and frustration, and make the impossibility of her escape even more poignant. As

serious as he is mordantly critical about Mexico's social and political problems, Naranjo has fashioned a riveting thriller by which to expose them.

♦♦ Mar Diestro-Dópidio

CREDITS

Producer
Pablo Cruz
Written by
Gerardo Naranjo
Mauricio Katz
Director of
Photography
Mátyás Erdély
Editor
Gerardo Naranjo
Art Director
Ivonne Fuentes
Music Supervisor
Lynn Fainchtein
Sound
Pablo Lach
Salvador Félix
Costume Designer
Anna Terrazas

Production Companies
Canana, Fox International Productions, El Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía IMCINE, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes CONACULTA, Fondo de Inversión y Estímulos al Cine (FIDECINE)
Made with the financial incentives of article 266 of the LISR (EFICINE) MÉXICO
Promecap, S.A. de C.V., Nuevos Negocios DM San Luis S.A. de C.V. present

Executive Producers
Gael García Bernal
Diego Luna
Geminiano Pineda

CAST

Stephanie Sigman
Laura
Noe Hernández
Lino
Lakshmi Picazo
Suzu
Leonor Victoria
Luisa Janes
Irene Azuela
Jessica
José Yenque
Kike Cámara
James Russo
Jimmy
Juan Carlos Galván
Arturo
Javier Zaragoza
Ramón Guerrero
Hugo Márquez
Javi Fernández
Eduardo Mendizábal
Quiño
Sergio Gómez Padilla
Parca

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution

10,153 ft +8 frames

Monte Carlo

USA/Luxembourg/Hungary/
France/Monaco 2011
Director: Thomas Bezucha
Certificate PG 108m 36s

Monte Carlo began as British playwright/director Jez Butterworth's follow-up to 2001's *Birthday Girl*. Based on Jules Bass's novel *Headhunters*, its plot then turned on four New Jersey women pretending to be wealthy abroad, landing four equally mercenary gigolos. All such unwholesome elements have been excised from the final product, designed as tween-girl-friendly entertainment. The protagonists are younger and more naive: earnest Grace (Selena Gomez) has just graduated from high school, while her stepsister Meg (Leighton Meester) is an uptight college student. Grace's vaguely slutty friend Emma (Katie Cassidy) rounds out the trio. Stuck in a small Texas town, Grace has been saving for a graduation trip to Paris for years, but once there the three girls find themselves in predictably dingy lodgings and embark on a joyless package sightseeing expedition. Just as the sense of disillusionment is kicking in, Grace is mistaken for Cordelia Winthrop-Scott (Gomez again), a bratty socialite doppelganger. A few plot mechanics later, Grace and friends are in Monte Carlo (actually mostly Budapest)

CREDITS

Produced by
Arnon Milchan
Denise Di Novi
Alison Greenspan
Nicole Kidman
Screenplay
Thomas Bezucha
April Blair
Maria Maggenti
Screen Story
Kelly Bove
Based on the novel
Headhunters by Jules
Bass
**Director of
Photography**
Jonathan Brown
Film Editor
Jeffrey Ford
Production Designer
Hugo Luczyc-Wyhnowski
Music Composed by
Michael Giacchino
Sound Mixer
John Rodda
Costume Designer

Shay Culliffe
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Regency Entertainment
(USA), Inc. and Dune
Entertainment III LLC (in
the US only)
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Film Corporation.
Monarchy Enterprises
S.a.r.l. and Dune
Entertainment III LLC (in
all other territories
except Brazil, Italy,
Japan, Korea and Spain)
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Company, Twentieth
Century Fox Film
Corporation, Monarchy
Enterprises S.a.r.l. and
Dune Entertainment III
LLC (in Brazil, Italy,
Japan, Korea and Spain)
**Production
Companies**

Fox 2000 Pictures and
Regency Enterprises
present a Di Novi
Pictures production
Made in association
with Dune
Entertainment
Filmed with the
assistance of the French
Tax Rebate for
International
Productions
Executive Producers
Stan Wlodkowski
Deborah Schindler
Forest Whitaker
Per Saari
Film Extracts
To Catch a Thief (1954)

CAST

Selena Gomez
Grace Bennett/Cordelia
Winthrop Scott
Leighton Meester
Meg
Katie Cassidy

Emma
Cory Monteith
Owen
Andie MacDowell
Pam
Catherine Tate
Alicia Winthrop Scott
Pierre Boulanger
Theo
Luke Bracey
Riley
Brett Cullen
Robert
Valérie Lemercier
Madame Valerie
**Dolby Digital
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[1.85:1]**

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)
9.774 ft +0 frames



A frock and a hard place: Leighton Meester, Selena Gomez, Katie Cassidy

with Cordelia's designer wardrobe. Early on, Meg snaps that she doesn't want to get sucked into "the sisterhood of the travelling to France" – and with its trio of female journeys of self-discovery, *Monte Carlo* plays like an anodyne version of the relatively tough-

minded *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2005). Here, there's no crisis that expensive clothing and make-up can't solve, though the real message is that all three girls are already perfect: all they needed for men to worship them was the external trappings. As Gomez's end-credits song 'Who Says' unambivalently asserts, "I'm sure you got some things you'd like to change about yourself, but when it comes to me, I wouldn't want to be anybody else" – an empowerment message not that far removed from unappealing solipsism.

Attentantly, each woman receives the man she deserves. For Grace, it's Theo (Pierre Boulanger), a wispy French boy who admires her cowboy boots (worn to a formal charity ball), while Meg gets laidback Aussie Riley (Luke Bracey), who's roaming Europe after recovering from a rugby injury. As for Emma, she leaves boyfriend Owen (Cory Monteith) behind in Texas: he proposes marriage the night before she leaves, clearly concerned she'll sleep around abroad, and she exits in an understandable huff, angry that the one time something big happens, her boyfriend has to be possessive and spoil it. But a woman's destiny is marriage, so Emma realises that Owen's her dreamboat and all she wants is to stay in Texas and get married. The movie possesses roughly zero sense of irony or scepticism about any of this.

Co-writer/director Tom Bezucha is mostly unobtrusive, aside from sporadic, inexplicable violent zooms that threaten to make the film interesting. There's one good joke towards the end, when an exasperated French concierge exclaims in his native tongue, "But why am I speaking English?" – a neat acknowledgement of the usual Hollywood practice of making the rest of the world speak its language. Otherwise, it's all girl power via dresses – a dubious but standard message.

♦♦ Vadim Rizov

Newsreel 1

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Alex Reuben

Legend has it that when the first reel of *Battleship Potemkin* unspooled at its world premiere, the final reel was still being assembled. According to Sergei Eisenstein, they ran out of glue at a crucial moment and had to substitute saliva, which thankfully proved up to the task. Modern digital technology means that DJ-filmmaker Alex Reuben shouldn't have the same problem, but the marketing hook of his ongoing *Newsreel* project is that each piece will also be shot and edited as close to the release date as possible. (Old-fashioned print deadlines dictated that the version under review was watched online a fortnight before the premiere, so some details may change.)

Newsreel 1 consists of impressions of London, stressing its arts, music and dance, its architecture, its multicultural vibrancy and its public protest. While the content is often surprisingly close to the reportage traditions first set up by early British newsreels such as the *Gaumont Graphic*, *Pathé's Animated Gazette* or *Topical Budget*, the absence of any spoken or written commentary establishes it as closer kin to Anthony Simmons's music-hall-scored *Sunday by the Sea* (1953) and *Bow Bells* (1954), Ken Russell's short BBC item *London Moods* (1961) or Phil Munnich's *Captain Zip* studies of London punks (1978-81).

Reuben made his reputation with the documentary *Routes: Dancing to New Orleans* (2008), and *Newsreel 1* shows further evidence of a lively eye and ear for visual and sonic juxtaposition (which he calls 'choreogeography' – "like psychogeography, but in movement"). Extreme close-ups turn coloured and patterned cloth, green Thameside algae and patterns in brickwork into abstract studies of colour and texture. A shot of people walking beside the river is inverted, emphasising form and movement. Scaffolding and glass-and-steel architecture are juxtaposed, revealing more in common than otherwise. Some shots recall Patrick Keiller's wry visual commentary: a BP sunflower logo can be glimpsed peeking over a wall beside an otherwise tranquil river scene.

The most eerily beautiful sequence features William Forsythe's 'Scattered Crowd' installation at King's Cross, featuring thousands of white and translucent balloons suspended from a ceiling at various heights, swaying gently before being burst off screen, strewing the floor with useless pieces of torn rubber. A more dangerous kind of artistic fragility is marked by a demonstration held in protest at the jailing of dissident Ai Weiwei, his absence symbolised by an empty chair admonishingly facing the Chinese Embassy.

Indeed, protest is the most frequently recurring theme, whether it's the pub-singalong mutation of 'Knees Up Mother Brown' into an anti-Blair and Bush polemic or anti-government demonstrations in front of Parliament



Hot off the streets: 'Newsreel 1'

and in Oxford Circus. The latter setting offers surprising scope for surreally incongruous images, whether lines of drummers clad in lime green or a burning effigy of a larger-than-lifeline horse which causes plumes of black smoke to drift over the top of Oxford Street shopfronts, inescapably bringing to mind the August 2011 riots a few months later.

Television critics often complain that they're expected to assess the lasting worth of a series on the basis of its first episode. What the *Newsreel* project will look like in a year's time is anyone's guess, and clearly strongly dependent on whether Reuben can reinvent the choreogeographic formula with sufficient freshness each time. But from this native Londoner's perspective (which probably also affects appreciation), it's a very promising start.

Michael Brooke

CREDITS

Produced by
Alex Reuben
Camera
Alex Reuben
Sound
Alex Reuben

©A Reuben Film
Production Companies
Commissioned by
Sadler's Wells and
supported by the
National Lottery

through Arts Council
England
Executive Producer
for Sadler's Wells:
Emma Gladstone

In Colour
[L78.1]

Distributor
A Reuben Film

SYNOPSIS

London, 2009-11. A series of impressions of life in the capital, including an Eritrean wedding and subsequent dance, a riverside banquet, a Thameside walk, a contemporary music concert, a political pub singalong, tranquil family strolls and t'ai chi in a park, the Swap and Share Picnic at Shoreditch's Arnold Circus, William Forsythe's 'Scattered Crowd' installation involving thousands of white balloons in a disused railway shed, and anti-government protests outside Parliament, in Oxford Circus (where an effigy of a horse is burned) and in front of the Chinese Embassy (the latter demanding the release of jailed artist Ai Weiwei).



Out of his depth: Colm Meaney

Parked

Ireland/Finland 2010
Director: Darragh Byrne

This low-key Irish drama certainly warrants its title, for once the story has established middle-aged singleton Colm Meaney living out of his Mazda saloon in a Dublin Bay municipal car park, it remains disarmingly static for what seems like a very long time, until events resolve themselves in a final act of stultifying predictability. With Meaney's shy fiftysomething drifter, Colin Morgan's troubled junkie and Milka Ahlroth's kindly Scandinavian widow as its main characters, Darragh Byrne's film certainly doesn't lack sympathy for the lost, lonely and frankly befuddled – but providing a sustained dramatic through-line for this seemingly ill-matched trio proves a challenging task for Ciaran Creagh's script.

The film's strongest notion is that it takes a character at a crossroads in his life and puts him in the curious position of being neither one place nor another: since he's 'of no fixed abode', Meaney can't get welfare assistance – no fixed address, no job, no cheques. What's a sometime jeweller, whose life has fallen apart for reasons we never quite discover, to do in such circumstances? Wait, it turns out, for the contrivances of the storyline to throw up solutions. Morgan, living in the car park in his yellow hatchback just a few spaces along, never convinces as a real junkie. He's merely a plot device with his own readymade crises (estranged from his widower dad, owing money to a semi-sinister dealer) so that his tribulations can help Meaney put his life in perspective, while also adding a dash of youthful spirit to cajole the older man out of his ongoing funk.

Midlife stasis is a demanding subject for celluloid, one that risks wearing out our patience: we can't help feeling that this set-in-his-ways moocher simply needs to make more of an effort to embrace life. Moreover, the film's underplayed romance is merely another layer of cliché, since it's hard to

understand what a seemingly well-adjusted woman like Ahlroth would see in the tongue-tied and reserved Meaney. One imagines the filmmakers expected that the casting of a Finnish actress would provide some unexpected tang, but after Iben Hjejle in Conor McPherson's *The Eclipse* (2009) and Paprika Steen in Nick Whitfield's *Skeletons* (2010), it's fair to say this notion isn't as fresh as it once was – and Ahlroth's character is easily the sketchiest of the central trio.

Since the film's second act pretty much amounts to a delaying strategy, moving the characters around on walks and chance encounters to put off the confrontations we know are needed to move everyone on, the sluggish pace does little to revive our flagging interest. Hardly the performers' fault, since Meaney is impeccable as ever, suggesting glints of life just under the

surface of a man seemingly locked in a cycle of lowered expectations, while Morgan is mercurial enough in a barely playable role and Ahlroth warm and probably way too wise for these two muddlers. Still, the characters never really strike sparks off one another with the intensity required to give the drama any significant charge – a shame, since in principle it's good to see a story that isn't for once fixated on the problems of the young. Perhaps in reaction to the lo-fi grit of successful Irish exports such as *Adam & Paul* (2004) and *Kisses* (2008), director Byrne has gone for a more sculpted, expressive approach, all artful framing and colour filters, but the effect is self-conscious and distracting, while Niall Byrne's soggy sub-Rachel Portman score signally fails to supply the emotional uplift required. Parked indeed.

Trevor Johnston

CREDITS

Producers
Jacqueline Kerrin
Dominic Wright
Screenplay
Ciaran Creagh
Screen Story
Darragh Byrne
Ciaran Creagh
Director of Photography
John Conroy
Edited by
Guy Montgomery
Production Designer
Owen Power
Composer
Niall Byrne
Sound Design
Krika Sainio

Costume Designer
Susan Scott

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Production Companies
Ripple World Pictures presents a Ripple World Pictures, Helsinki Filmi production with the participation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board, The Finnish Film Foundation in association with RTÉ. Produced with the support of investment incentives for the Irish

Film Industry provided by the Government of Ireland. Made under the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production

CAST

Colm Meaney
Fred Daly
Colin Morgan
Cathal O'Regan
Milka Ahlroth
Juliana
Stuart Graham
George O'Regan
Michael McElhatton
Frank

David Wilmot
Peter
Tatiana Ouliankina
aqua aerobics instructor
Diarmuid Noyes
Cathal's brother
Mark Butler
Clippo

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Element Pictures

SYNOPSIS Dublin, present day. Fred arrives on the ferry from England and starts living out of his car in a car park on the coast road. He is refused welfare assistance because he has no fixed abode. He is joined in the car park by Cathal, a young drug addict living in his yellow hatchback. Fred encounters Juliana at a local swimming pool and has another chance to talk to her at a rehearsal of the church choir, where she's playing piano. He hesitates to ask her out since he's living in his car, but after fixing a clock belonging to her late husband, he plucks up the courage to invite her to the car park. Cathal, whose spirited attitude is an inspiration to Fred, is attacked by the drug dealer to whom he owes money. Fred returns to find both cars trashed and Cathal gone, so he searches for him, missing Juliana in the process. Cathal has returned to his father's house, but the latter is still bitter at his son for driving his mother to an early grave. Cathal steals some cash and takes a fatal overdose. Fred attends the wake and lets Cathal's father know that his son was a good friend. Fred's damaged car is removed, and Juliana decides to return to her native Helsinki – leaving Fred a piece of music she wrote for him.

Now rehoused, Fred faces the future with renewed resolve.



Things fall apart: Ewan McGregor

Perfect Sense

United Kingdom/Denmark/
Sweden/Ireland 2010

Director: David Mackenzie

Certificate 15 92m 22s

Part of a growing genre of apocalyptic arthouse films (along with Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* and John Hillcoat's *The Road*), *Perfect Sense* is a love story that unfolds against a backdrop of death and hysteria.

Scottish director David Mackenzie and his screenwriter Kim Fupz Aakeson have succeeded in making a smart and cerebral sci-fi/romance. What *Perfect Sense* lacks, however, is the edge or emotional violence that Mackenzie brought to *Young Adam*, his earlier collaboration with actor Ewan McGregor, so that the protagonists here seem strangely aloof as the world implodes around them and a mysterious epidemic destroys their senses one by one. Max Richter's music is strangely reminiscent of some of Arvo Pärt's mournful compositions, colours are desaturated, and the tone is melancholic. There are several self-conscious montage sequences, accompanied by a pensive voiceover, in which we see still images of rites and family celebrations – such moments, it's implied, are being lost for good. Incongruously, at the same time that humanity is teetering on the abyss, McGregor's Michael, a chef in a Glasgow restaurant, is busy wooing Eva Green's scientist Susan.

Michael is the latest in a long line of Jack the lads that McGregor has played, ranging from Renton in *Trainspotting* (1996) to his drifter in *Young Adam* (2003). He brings his customary rough-edged charm to the role, and enjoys some lively moments with his *Trainspotting* co-star Ewen Bremner (who here plays a sous chef). But what he doesn't convey as he cycles round Glasgow is any sense of erotic obsession or all-consuming love for Susan. Green, meanwhile, gives a poised and intelligent performance without showing much in the way of emotional urgency. Neither lover seems particularly concerned that society is

falling apart – nor are the rest of the characters especially bothered by the catastrophic events going on around them. There is a curious sense of fatalism: "All the unaffected can do is wait," we are told. Disconcertingly, capitalism doesn't appear to be affected by the ongoing chaos: even at the direst moments, people still report to work, go to art galleries, eat in restaurants.

Some of the most effective scenes are the ones in which the film loses its self-consciousness and instead embraces traditional horror-movie conventions. In one tremendous sequence, we see characters so consumed by hunger they'll eat anything – raw fish and meat, flowers, whatever is to hand. Mackenzie also throws in some well-observed satirical touches: humanity may have lost its sense of smell and taste but

diners at the upmarket restaurant where Michael cooks still want to be seen eating out in public. (The menu consists only of flour and fat but pretentious restaurant reviewers still find plenty to write about.)

In the latter part of the film, desperation mounts. We see Susan driving through streets full of hysterical passers-by; the authorities become ever more aggressive as they try to curb the chaos. As the characters lose their hearing, there are a few moments in which there is no sound. Even at this point, the film is pulling in two opposing directions. This is at once a story about humanity in dire peril and a tale of two lovers who've had a bad row. The problem is that the two halves don't quite add up.

Geoffrey Macnab

CREDITS

Produced by
Gillian Berne
Malte Grunert
Written by
Kim Fupz Aakeson
Director of Photography
Giles Nuttgens
Editor
Jake Roberts
Production Designer
Tom Sayer
Composer
Max Richter
Production Sound Mixer
Barry O'Sullivan
Costume Designer
Trisha Biggar

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Zentropa
Entertainments5 ApS/

Subotica Ltd/BBC
Production Companies
BBC Films presents in association with Zentropa
Entertainments5 and Scottish Screen with the participation of the Danish Film Institute and Film i Väst and Bord Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board a Sigma film
Produced with the support of investment incentives for the Irish Film Industry provided by the Government of Ireland
With the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union supported by the National Lottery

through Scottish Screen
Co-produced by Zentropa
Entertainments5 ApS and Subotica Ltd
Executive Producers
Jamie Laursen
Peter Aalbak Jensen
Peter Garde
Tomas Eskilsson
Carole Sheridan
David Mackenzie

CAST

Ewan McGregor
Michael
Eva Green
Susan
Ewen Bremner
James
Stephen Dillane
Stephen
Denis Lawson
boss

Anamaria Marinca
street performer
Alastair Mackenzie
virologist
Connie Nielsen
Jenny

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Arrow Film Distributors Ltd

8,313 ft +0 frames

POM Wonderful Presents The Greatest Movie Ever Sold

USA 2011

Director: Morgan Spurlock

Certificate 12A 87m 30s

If the old adage about there being no such thing as bad publicity is true, then *Super Size Me* (2004) – in which Morgan Spurlock committed himself to eating at McDonalds every mealtime for a month to highlight the deleterious effects of a fast-food diet – must have had Ronald McDonald grinning from ear to ear. Although the more immediate feeling was that Spurlock was a renegade thorn in the side of the fast-food corporation, his eccentric campaign allegedly prompting the company to drop its 'Super Size' option and introduce salads to the menu, human nature does not preclude the possibility that there were many viewers who, after sitting through 98 minutes of talk of Big Macs and McMuffins, would have left the cinema with an inchoate craving, the sign of the golden arches scorched on their retinas.

The all-pervasiveness of branding, and especially the subliminal persuasions of product placement in movies, provides Spurlock with the subject for his newest film. Intrigued by the leverage and exposure that summer blockbusters acquire through partnerships with big-name brands in return for products being none-too-discreetly displayed on screen, Spurlock set out to see if smaller movies, such as his own, could benefit from the same aggressive strategies. The result is a documentary in which Spurlock, in his trademark guerrilla style, trawls the boardrooms of potential sponsors in search of investors who'll willingly stump up some cash. In return, they'll have their product displayed prominently on screen, repeated plugs from Spurlock throughout his movie's duration and – if the price is right – an above-the-title presentation credit.

This is the least romantic film about filmmaking yet made: a film about its own funding. As such, there's a sense of anticlimax when the movie reaches its end, with financing secured from companies displaying varying levels of trepidation and enthusiasm about Spurlock's project. And you realise that it's – the film you've been watching Spurlock touting around is the one you've just seen; its production is its pre-production. After all, you already know the ending: it's above the title.

Some of the companies that Spurlock cold-calls understandably hang up on him mid-sentence, not wanting their brand image anywhere near this prickly troublemaker. If he can get McDonalds to change its menus, imagine the potential collateral damage for

SYNOPSIS Michael, a chef in a Glasgow restaurant, is fearful of emotional commitment. Susan is a research scientist who lives opposite the restaurant. She and her fellow scientists are baffled by a mysterious epidemic that is depriving people of their senses. Smell is the first sense to go, then taste.

Susan and Michael begin a relationship. Michael's restaurant stays open, even though customers can't smell or taste the food. One night, Susan and Michael exchange secrets: she tells him that she can't have children; he tells her that he abandoned a former girlfriend who grew very ill. When people across the world start losing their hearing, rage and violence mount. The restaurant finally closes. Michael turns violently against Susan and smashes up the apartment. He subsequently apologises, leaving a message on her phone and blaming his behaviour on the 'disease'. She reacts with fury.

A voiceover reveals that as society breaks down, there are two movements: nihilists who loot and cause destruction, and others who believe that life will somehow continue. Michael and Susan track each other down and are reunited.



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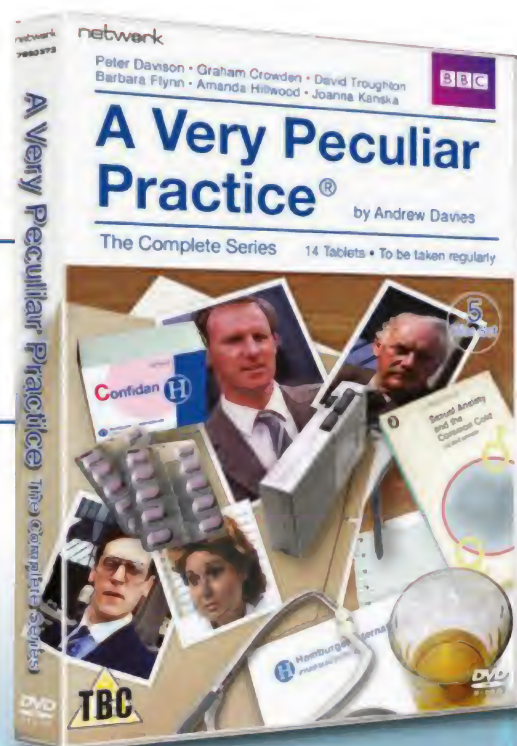
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I'll do anything, for you dear anything: Morgan Spurlock

companies lower down the corporate pecking order. The brands that do, tentatively, fall for Spurlock's pitch and agree to part-finance his film do so because they perceive a 'good fit' between their products and his chirpy-edgy persona. POM Wonderful, the pomegranate juice giant which Spurlock persuades to invest \$1 million as headline sponsor, does so bravely but savvily: progressive and ethical, at least by popular reputation, POM has little to fear from the Spurlock association but much to gain from the new avenues of dissemination that marketing and coverage of the documentary will permeate. This is the first time you've read about a pomegranate juice in the pages of *Sight & Sound*.

There's no doubt that Spurlock is having his brand-non-specific cake and eating it. He claims he's not "selling out" but "buying in", taking advantage of and drawing attention to a practice that is ubiquitous yet often goes unnoticed. He visits the Brazilian city of São Paulo, which in 2007 banned advertising in public spaces, but his admiration for this radical alternative to visual bombardment feels like a footnote. Instead, as when gleefully endorsing Merrell trainers during an interview with social critic Ralph Nader, the filmmaker often seems to be dancing on quicksand.

SYNOPSIS A documentary in which Morgan Spurlock examines the practice of product placement in movies. Determining to harness some brand tie-ins of his own, he approaches a number of companies and asks them to provide financing in exchange for their products appearing in, or being endorsed in, his film. He hopes to tempt one company to put up \$1 million in return for an above-the-title credit and inclusion in all the film's marketing.

We see scenes of Spurlock's boardroom negotiations alongside interviews with marketing professionals and filmmakers including Brett Ratner and Quentin Tarantino, who talk about their experiences with product placement. Spurlock travels to the Brazilian city of São Paulo, which in 2007 banned all public advertising. He successfully negotiates a headline sponsorship deal with the pomegranate juice company POM Wonderful.

Part of the pleasure of this giddily entertaining, provocative but uneasy documentary is assessing the extent to which Spurlock keeps his head above the sand – and the extent to which he wants to. His proofs of integrity are the transparency of his film and his right to final cut, which is written into each contract he signs. Neither of these quite holds up. While in theory we see Spurlock's negotiations on screen from pitch to done deal, a sixth sense tells us that the minutiae of (at least) the POM settlement were hammered out behind closed doors. And what does final cut mean if it's the final cut of a sellout?

♦♦ Sam Wigley

CREDITS

Produced by
Jeremy Chilnick
Abbie Hurewitz
Morgan Spurlock
Keith Calder
Jessica Wu
Written by
Jeremy Chilnick
Morgan Spurlock
Director of Photography
Daniel Murracino
Edited by
Thomas M. Vogt
Original Music
Jon Spurney
Minister of Sound
Brian Fish

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Production Companies
A Snoot
Entertainment/Warrior
Poets production
A film by Morgan Spurlock

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
The Works UK
Distribution Ltd.

7,874 ft +7 frames



Stare crazy: Michael Parks, John Goodman

Red State

USA 2011

Director: Kevin Smith

Certificate 18 88m 25s

Ever since his feature debut *Clerks* (1994), Kevin Smith has been known as the foul-mouthed king of zing, peppering his films with fast, often jaw-droppingly profane dialogue (when, that is, he isn't bogging them down in patience-stretching didactic monologues as with *Chasing Amy*). There's plenty of zing in Smith's latest, *Red State*: in its first act, three college kids are heard discussing what they are hoping to do with the older woman who has invited them, via an online dating service, to have group sex with her; and later, a wry riposte from ATF agent Joseph Keenan (John Goodman) about the fundamentalist mindset will actually be met (deservedly) with the line, "Zing!"

This trademark energy, however, extends beyond the characters' pacy, racy exchanges to the way that *Red*

State's scenes unfold, with one narrative surprise followed fast by another. Take the sequence where the three boys are driving to their nocturnal assignation in rural Cooper's Dell: en route, they accidentally wing a car parked in the shadows (zing!); as they get out to see the damage, a male figure suddenly sits up in the driver's seat (zing!); startled, they flee so quickly that they fail to notice a second male figure who has clearly been fellingating the first (zing!); and then, as the driver heads to the police station, we discover that he's the local sheriff (zing!). This episode reflects in miniature an overall story structure in which the very separate worlds of three liberal young men, a family of murderous religious extremists, a taskforce of federal agents and some marijuana-growing 'eco kids' all violently sideswipe one another to produce a dialectic of clashing values against the backdrop of America's post-9/11 culture wars.

When, amid heavy gunfire from all sides, Keenan is heard complaining, "You said this was going to be a simple in and out," his words mirror what the sex-seeking college kids had also

SYNOPSIS The US, the present. Responding to an online invitation to group sex with an older woman named Sara, students Travis, Billy-Ray and Jarod head to Cooper's Dell, en route accidentally winging a parked car in which Sheriff Wynan is being felled. Wynan sends Deputy Pete after the boys. Inside Sara's trailer, the boys are drugged. Jarod wakes, caged, in a church, and watches preacher Abin Cooper preside over the murder of a gay man. The man's body is thrown into the basement below, where Travis and Billy-Ray use a protruding bone to cut through their bonds. Billy-Ray flees into an armoury, where he and his pursuer shoot one another. Outside, Pete hears the gunfire; while radioing Wynan, he is shot. Wynan considers suicide when Abin threatens to expose his homosexuality, but instead calls the ATF. Agent Joseph Keenan is ordered to lead a taskforce.

Travis, now armed, flees the compound but is shot by Wynan, who is accompanying the ATF team. As a gunfight breaks out, Keenan receives orders to kill everyone inside. Sara's daughter Cheyenne begs an agent to let her and the children out, but he is shot by Sara, who in turn is accidentally shot by Cheyenne. Jarod and Cheyenne surrender to Keenan but are both killed by another agent. When a loud trumpet blares, Abin and his surviving congregants disarm, believing that the Rapture has come.

Abin and his flock are jailed for life as terrorists. Keenan reveals that the trumpet sound was a prank by neighbouring marijuana dealers.

imagined (albeit in a rather different context) before discovering that their hot date with Sara (Melissa Leo) was a honey trap laid by sin-hating gun-nuts. "Simple," Keenan concludes, holding up his phone so that his commanding officer can hear the chaos all around, "just shit itself." Indeed, had the title not already been taken, *Red State* might well have been called *Blood Simple* – for while it flirts with the horror genre, especially in the scenes where the boys find themselves bound and at the non-existent mercy of a crazy redneck family, Smith's film winds up more reminiscent of a Coens-style 'clusterfuck' (to borrow an expression from *Burn After Reading*), as misunderstandings accumulate, coincidences collide and the body count escalates. Here, preacher Abin Cooper, played with horrifyingly avuncular conviction by Michael Parks, is Smith's equivalent to *No Country for Old Men*'s Anton Chigurh, embodying an unforgiving brand of righteous evil; pitted against him is Keenan (Goodman is of course a Coen brothers regular), a decent man reluctantly drawn into a reprise of the disastrous Waco siege, with plenty of innocents as collateral damage.

More secular in its satirical outlook than Smith's *Dogma* (1999), *Red State* exposes the horror not only of religious but also political zealotry, while offering a tense, shocking ride through the ideological tinderboxes of middle America. It is also at times very funny, including as its last laugh a *deus ex machina* provided not, as Abin unshakably believes, by a wrathful God, but by a bunch of unseen pothead pranksters.

♦♦ Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Produced by
Jonathan Gordon
Written by
Kevin Smith
Director of Photography
David Klein
Editor
Kevin Smith
Production Designer
Cabot McMullen
Production Sound Mixer
Glen Trew
Costume Designer
Beth Pasternak

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Production Companies
The Harvey Boys present
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Executive Producers
Elyse Seiden
Nhaelan McMillan
Victor Choy
Jason Clark
Philip Elway
Shea Kammer

CAST

Michael Parks
Abin Cooper
Michael Angarano
Travis
Kerry Bishé
Cheyenne
Nicholas Braun
Billy-Ray
Kyle Gallner
Jarod

John Goodman
Joseph Keenan
Melissa Leo
Sara
Kevin Pollak
ASAC Brooks
Stephen Root
Sheriff Wynnan
Matt Jones
Deputy Pete
Cooper Thornton
plastic wrap man
Kevin Alejandro
Harry, the tactical agent
Marc Blucas
ATF sniper

Dolby Digital
Colour by
DeLuxe
[L85:1]

Distributor
E! Films

7,957 ft +8 frames

Restless

USA 2011

Director: Gus Van Sant

ALSO
SHOWING
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Restless's young lovers Annabel and Enoch are played by Mia Wasikowska and Henry Hopper, the rangy 21-year-old son

of Dennis, who has a choppy head of yellow hair and a slot of a mouth. At first there's a blurry quality to his face: he looks like a daguerreotype in which the sitter moved as it was taken. Bringing that indistinct face into some focus is the whole of Hopper's performance, while it seems that Wasikowska is flattening her own readings to match his lack of timbre.

If wanly acted, Enoch and Annabel are the most handsome, extravagantly costumed teen couple you'll ever see. Enoch looks like an Edwardian dandy one day, a mid-80s Cure member the next. Annabel, who wears her hair close-cropped, prefers Tom Sawyer tomboy, with widow's weeds to crash a funeral. There is, in this, an exaggeration of the teenager's fickleness in trying on identities, a game that climaxes in Enoch and Annabel's Halloween outing in a Portland-by-night which DP Harris Savides sculpts as suburban-baroque.

Gus Van Sant's latest tale of beautiful outsiders likewise has a quality of playing dress-up, rummaging ideas from the well-stocked closet of young-adult fictions. Jason Lew, a first-time screenwriter, adapts his series of stage sketches into a genre pastiche: the dying-too-young storyline is a YA staple; there's an obvious echo of *Harold and Maude* (1971) in Enoch's recreational funeral-going; the bullies who chase Enoch out of the Halloween party are in *Lord of the Flies* regalia, complete with pig's head on a stick. Even the soundtrack cues are familiar: the climactic use of Nico's 'The Fairest of the Seasons' brings up interfering memories of *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), while there's a faint breeze from Van Sant's own past troubled-young-man movies when a thin voice repeats over the gently noodled, saccharine soundtrack, "It's not your fault, it's not your fault" – Robin Williams's mantra in *Good Will Hunting* (1997). Above all, the story is haunted by the ghosts of

Edgar Allan Poe, a death-obsessed orphan like Enoch, and his lost child-bride Virginia, remembered in his 'Annabel Lee': "I was a child and she was a child/In this kingdom by the sea" – referring, here, to Portland.

From the opening passenger-window views of the Willamette River docks, Van Sant and Savides give the north-west a presence both ethereal and lushly alive, all autumn rankness and milky, soft-edged light under inclement skies. Lew's script relies on the measured doling out of backstory to propel a mostly static, somewhat stately film. A recurring image is Annabel and Enoch seated side by side, observing a scene – a football game, the waterfront – just conversing. Rather than bringing Annabel and Enoch before us as individuals, though, *Restless* succeeds best at posing them in album-sleeve images drawing on a pop tradition of innocent love, the aesthetic particularly leaning towards Sarah or K Records twee. But where the similarly mixtaped *Submarine* (2010) at least gave its young people self-consciousness and a role in performing their cover version of first love, Wasikowska and Hopper are here only as new, pretty faces fronting a Van Sant performance.

♦♦ Nick Pinkerton

CREDITS

Produced by
Brian Grazer
Ron Howard
Bryce Dallas Howard
Gus Van Sant
Written by
Jason Lew
Director of Photography
Harris Savides
Editor
Elliot Graham
Production Designer
Anne Ross
Music
Danny Elfman
Production Mixer
Felix Andrew
Costume Designer
Danny Glicker

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Production Companies
Sony Pictures Classics and Imagine
Entertainment present a Brian Grazer production
A film by Gus Van Sant
Executive Producers
David Allen Cress
Eric Black
Michael Sugar

Sarah Bowen
Erica Huggins

CAST

Henry Hopper
Enoch Brae
Mia Wasikowska
Annabel Cotton
Ryo Kase
Hiroshi Takahashi
Schuyler Fisk
Elizabeth Cotton
Jane Adams
Mabel
Chin Han
Dr Lee
Lusia Strus
Rachel Cotton
Paul Parson
Edward

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[L85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

Sleeping Beauty

Australia 2011

Director: Julia Leigh

First-time filmmaker Julia Leigh, the author of two novels, *The Hunter* and *Disquiet*, secured an influential backer for *Sleeping Beauty* in the person of Jane Campion, who mentored Leigh based on her screenplay. Like Campion's films, *Sleeping Beauty* centres on that fairytale figure of femininity: the literally or figuratively unconscious girl, hovering on the brink of self- and sexual awareness. Campion's protagonists – such as Ada in *The Piano* (1993) or Ruth in *Holy Smoke* (1999) – achieve epiphanic awakenings through sexual self-expression. Leigh's protagonist Lucy – who takes a job as a 'sleeping beauty', drugged asleep while male clients spend the night with her – fulfils male characters' fantasies by voluntarily entering into a physical unconsciousness that mirrors, and intensifies, her numb drift through university and part-time employment.

Leigh's novels are celebrated for their spare and intimate exploration of characters who appear as blank as Lucy but are internally roiling with obsession and loss. *Sleeping Beauty* aspires to create a similarly haunted disconnect between Lucy's presentation and her subjectivity. Yet Leigh isn't able to muster a cinematic equivalent of a first-person narration that would convey Lucy's interiority to the viewer, not least because Lucy is isolated, inarticulate, arch and frequently asleep. Despite scenes where we watch Lucy while she's alone, or hear only her side of phone conversations, we as viewers have no privileged insight into her motivations or reactions.

Lucy's muteness – she barely speaks when spoken to, using formulaic repetitions even with her only friend Birdmann – isn't the tactical weapon employed by Campion's Ada, or the observant wonder of Morvern Callar in Lynne Ramsay's 2002 film; it is a first-timer's technical flaw, along with the arch yet leaden dialogue ("Your vagina is a temple," Lucy's employer Clara tells her), the *longue durée* with its insistently flat pictorial framing, and the stilted nature of the performances. The flawed direction is most apparent during the film's only attempt at dramatic tension, when Lucy is first rendered unconscious and Clara brings a client into the room where she sleeps. It's the first extended moment in the film in which Lucy is not – cannot be – the point-of-view character, and the surrender of her connection to the audience should create a frisson. Instead, the client delivers to camera a summary of a portentous Cortázar story.

This literary reference, which implies that the film aspires to an allegorical interpretation, is as empty as other hovering allusions to the tradition of the European fairytale and to the Japanese classic *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* by Kawabata Yasunari, from

SYNOPSIS Present-day Portland, Oregon, the autumn. Teenagers Enoch and Annabel meet at a boy's funeral. Annabel knew the deceased from the cancer ward where she says she volunteers; Enoch just likes to go to funerals. As they embark on a shy courtship, Enoch introduces Annabel to his imaginary friend Hiroshi, the ghost of a Japanese kamikaze pilot with whom he plays battleships, and to his parents' gravestones, who happen to be buried in the cemetery where the kids hang out. Annabel reveals that she doesn't in fact volunteer at the cancer ward, but instead goes there for treatment. She tells Enoch that she was given only a few months to live at her last visit. She has a passion for naturalism, because a sense of geological time and lifecycles allows her to face the end with aplomb. Although Annabel's sister suspects Enoch's motives, the two young people become a couple. They go out together on Halloween dressed as a kamikaze pilot and a geisha, and make love for the first time in a woodsman's shed. The two are initially almost playful about Annabel's fate, even rehearsing her last hours, but Enoch begins to crack under the strain; he threatens Annabel's doctor and runs amok before catching a beating that lands him in the same hospital as Annabel. They are there reconciled, and Enoch is with Annabel when she dies.

At Annabel's funeral, the junk-food buffet she and Enoch once imagined is laid out.



Rude awakening: Emily Browning, Rachel Blake

which the conceit of men paying to be with unconscious women is borrowed. Whereas Catherine Breillat's 2010 *Sleeping Beauty* engaged wittily and critically with the operations of gender, class and race, Leigh's film simply reproduces them, from the Orientalism of the premise through to the aspirational class narrative of the fairytale princess. Lucy embodies Catherine Hakim's problematic and much derided theory of 'erotic capital' – she's a postmodern woman who trades on her looks in order to receive money via the passive power of being desired.

While Lucy's variety of jobs – as an office temp, a waitress and a participant in scientific experiments – suggest that all labour is a form of prostitution, the film's idealised and desexualised

portrayal of well-remunerated sex work is itself a fairytale, not least because Lucy gains the position through her resemblance to the archetypal blonde, white-skinned fairytale princess. When answering Clara's job ad, she describes herself over the phone as "slim... pert" – and, without a cinematic solution that allows the viewer access to her subjectivity, her physical attributes remain the defining qualities of her character. The film's concluding shot, a recursion to grainy surveillance video footage of Lucy asleep (a tactic overly familiar from Michael Haneke's *Hidden*), supposedly confronts viewers with evidence of our own voyeurism and/or complicity in the traffic in women, but only serves to underline the film's.

◆ Sophie Mayer

CREDITS

Produced by
Jessica Brentnall
Written by
Julia Leigh
Director of Photography
Geoffrey Simpson
Editor
Nick Meyers
Production Design
Annie Beauchamp
Composer
Ben Frost
Sound Designer
Sam Petty
Costume Designer
Shareen Beringer

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production
A Julia Leigh film
Executive Producers
Tim White
Alan Cardy
Jamie Hilton

CAST

Emily Browning
Lucy
Rachael Blake
Clara
Ewen Leslie
Birdmann
Peter Carroll
man 1
Chris Haywood
man 2

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[L85:1]

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

Soul Surfer

USA 2011

Director: Sean McNamara

Certificate PG 105m 47s

The real-life events behind *Soul Surfer* are pretty amazing. Bethany Hamilton was only 13 years old, and facing a promising career as a pro surfer, when her left arm was bitten off by a shark. But while other adolescents might have railed against the iniquities of fate, Hamilton was back on a board within three weeks of the attack, and one year later was crowned national champion in her age group. More remarkable, perhaps, was her decision to embrace the opportunity for Christian evangelism that her disability offered. As she puts it in her 2004 autobiography, she has been able to reach more people with one arm than she ever could have with two.

Previously the subject of a short, faith-based documentary, *Heart of a Soul Surfer* (2007), Hamilton's story deserves telling: whether or not you share her religious conviction, there's no doubt that her courage, determination and relentless positivity are inspirational. The story is also a natural fit for UK distributor Disney, which has of late cornered the market in glowing all-American teens who credit their well-roundedness to Jesus. One can't help but wish, though, that a director such as Danny Boyle, whose *127 Hours* has clear overlaps with *Soul Surfer*, had got hold of this material instead of TV stalwart Sean McNamara. For while McNamara has crafted a solid, family-friendly drama, there remains something of the made-for-TV movie about this tale of triumph over adversity which undermines the extraordinary accomplishments of its heroine.

Soul Surfer is awash with outdated, over-excitable MTV-style edits and cheesy Hallmark lines. It's surprising then that far from sanitising Hamilton's character, the filmmakers have in fact roughened it up, adding some moments of petulance and self-doubt which the real-life Hamilton has claimed never happened. The addition of a nemesis figure may well add tension to the tournament drama that constitutes the film's final half hour, but it smacks of a certain condescension towards audiences. Can't viewers be credited to

engage with Bethany's values unless they are offset against a villainous rival and rewarded with a trophy at the film's conclusion?

Against this rather pedestrian backdrop, there are nonetheless a couple of fine performances. In the lead role, AnnaSophia Robb is credible without being cloying, despite having to contend with some rather dodgy CGI. And although Helen Hunt is miscast as Bethany's concerned mother, her face far too careworn and eyes too haunted to convince as a woman saved by grace, Dennis Quaid is charmingly craggy as her surf-dude dad. The lion's share of the credit, however, should go to Hamilton herself, performing her own stunts and offering up some sweet surf sequences in the process. As a final credit sequence pays tribute to its real-life heroine, it's a hard heart indeed that will fail to be moved.

◆ Catherine Wheatley

CREDITS

Produced by
David Zelon
Doug Schwartz
Dutch Hofstetter
Sean McNamara
David Brookwell
Screenplay
Sean McNamara
Deborah Schwartz
Douglas Schwartz
Michael Berk
Screen Story
Sean McNamara
Deborah Schwartz
Douglas Schwartz
Michael Berk
Matt R. Allen
Caleb Wilson
Bard Gann
Based on the book by
Bethany Hamilton,
Sheryl Berk, Rich
Bundschuh
Director of Photography
John R. Leonetti
Edited by
Jeff W. Canavan
Production Designer
Rusty Smith
Music
Marco Beltrami
Production Sound Mixer
John Reynolds
Costume Designer
Katie James
Stunt Co-ordinators
Gregory J. Barnett
Brian L. Keaulana

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Affirm Films a Brookwell McNamara Entertainment production
A Life's a Beach Entertainment and Mandalay Vision production
A Sean McNamara film
Executive Producers
David Tice
Dominic Ianno

CAST

AnnaSophia Robb
Bethany Hamilton
Helen Hunt
Chen Hamilton
Dennis Quaid
Tom Hamilton
Lorraine Nicholson
Alana Blanchard
Carrie Underwood
Sarah Hill
Kevin Sorbo
Holt Blanchard
Ross Thomas
Noah Hamilton
Chris Brochu
Timmy Hamilton
Jeremy Sumpter
Byron Blanchard
Sonya Balmores
Chung
Malina Birch
Craig T. Nelson
Dr Rovinsky
Cody Gomes
Keoki

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

9,520 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Hawaii, 2003. Thirteen-year-old Bethany Hamilton is a devout Christian with a promising future as a professional surfer. However, on 31 October she is attacked by a shark while out training with best friend Alana Blanchard. Alana and her father rush Bethany to hospital, saving her life, but her left arm is completely severed. When Bethany returns home after surgery her parents Tom and Cheri and brothers Noah and Tim are astounded by her positive attitude: within three weeks, Bethany is surfing again, albeit with some difficulty. However, she quits the sport entirely after struggling with rough conditions during her first post-accident competition. Encouraged by her church youth leader, Bethany visits Thailand to aid victims of the 2004 tsunami. On her return to the US, she discovers an abundance of fan mail waiting for her: her efforts to compete despite her disability have been a source of inspiration to young people all over the world. Buoyed by this, Bethany decides to return to pro surfing, and with the aid of a customised board competes in the national championships. Against the odds, Bethany reaches the final – but although she performs a flawless ride it is ruled out, since she caught the wave after the final klaxon had sounded. She finishes in fifth place. Arch rival Malina Birch nonetheless acknowledges that she was outperformed.



Balm for the soul: Robbie Gee, Eddie Nestor

The Story of Lover's Rock

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Menelik Shabazz

Certificate 12A 100m 56s

Menelik Shabazz's 1981 debut feature *Burning an Illusion* dealt with a woman's desire for domestic bliss in the face of unpleasant societal realities. Now, Shabazz returns to similar themes with this insightful documentary about one of British reggae's most fondly remembered and resilient subgenres – lover's rock.

Essentially a romantic alternative to rebellious 1970s roots and garrulous 1980s dancehall, lover's rock began with bass-heavy renditions of US soul ballads sung by and for first- and second-generation British-Caribbean teens. It was a vital reminder of the power of women to shape music when it becomes too coarse and male-dominated for their tastes. Eventually, Jamaican singers took trips to London to record in its mellow, dreamy style – an enduring achievement for a British scene still often deemed secondary to the island.

Lover's rock is shown here to be both a musical movement and a wider culture, a world of sensual slow dancing – 'scrubbing' – in dark, unlicensed, paraffin-heated 'blues dances'. Fittingly, Shabazz has sought the memories and opinions of people involved in that culture at all levels. Bassist/producer Dennis Bovell recalls his part in some of the earliest and biggest lover's hits – Louisa Mark's 'Caught You in a Lie' and Janet Kay's 'Silly Games' – and recalls how Dennis and Eve Harris named their label 'Lover's Rock' after a popular Augustus Pablo tune. Meanwhile Kay (who had a cameo in *Burning an Illusion*) remembers how topping the charts curtailed her first foreign holiday. We hear too from record retailers (John McGillivray) and

critics (John Masouri). And there are multi-talents such as *Burning an Illusion*'s male lead Victor Romero Evans and singer/TV chef Levi Roots, who sees the style's lineage in culinary terms – with his sauces and cookbooks positioned in shot.

Then, mirroring the awakening of Pat, *Burning an Illusion*'s central protagonist, Shabazz contrasts and contextualises the healing nature of the songs with the hardships of the time. The poet Linton Kwesi Johnson revisits the tragic injustice of the 1981 New Cross Fire and the subsequent riots; DJ-turned-academic Dr William Lez Henry gives moving accounts of the racist violence he faced; and engineers Mad Professor and Chris Lane describe the challenges of getting reggae into a hostile mainstream. The mood is lightened by nods to Shabazz's narrative work in fictional re-enactments by comedians Robbie Gee and Eddie Nestor. There is even a recycled scene from *Burning an Illusion*.

Lover's rock has been characterised as an inconsequential and escapist diversion. But as the film implies, in times of economic pressure and racial hatred, singing songs of love was one of the most radical things its participants could do. Well-paced, timely and deftly balanced to appeal to old hands and newcomers alike, this story – and the music itself – should not be ignored.

◆◆ Angus Taylor

CREDITS

Producer
Menelik Shabazz
Director of Photography
Ian Watts
Editor
Julian Sabath
Set Design
Fynna Dowe
Sound Mixers
Albert Bailey
Leon Lazarevic
Tawa Durowoju
Costume Design
Annie Curtis-Jones
Jacqueline Lodge-West

©Menelik Shabazz
Production Companies
BFM Media and SunRa Pictures

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Verve Pictures

9,084 ft + 0 frames

Tyrannosaur

United Kingdom 2010

Director: Paddy Considine

Certificate 18 92m 21s

When Peter Mullan's troubled, boozy widower walks past a winter-bare tree opposite his Leeds council house, actor-turned-director Paddy Considine frames his path in an angled shot which gives us pause to ponder: that leafless tree is surely more than a tree. A symbol of endurance and renewal, perhaps? That certainly fits Considine's story of damaged individuals toughing it out in the hope of better days ahead. Moments later, Mullan reaches the backyard ruins of the shed where his dog Bluey used to sleep. Bluey we've already seen kicked to death by his master in the opening scene, after Mullan is riled to incandescent, inexplicable and stupid anger by some minor slight in a betting shop. Hence the tumbledown remnants of the shed stand as an ongoing metaphor for the character's uncontrolled destructive and self-destructive urges; and as the ever-excellent Mullan seethes in the midst of the wreckage, his tightly drawn face tells us all we need to know about this guy's bleak backstory.

Clearly then, there's a bit more ambition on view here than in the usual British realist handheld nose around other people's misfortunes, and while the subject-matter's determinedly raw and confrontational, the treatment is sober and composed – deliberate widescreen framing setting the visual agenda rather than some mobile camera trailing the performers. Such self-evident seriousness risks bathos if the storytelling isn't up to the task, but Considine (here expanding his BAFTA-winning 2007 short *Dog Altogether*) proves equal to the challenge he's set himself – of humanising a central character who's introduced giving his own dog a fatal stomping. Even at this

early juncture, a journey towards redemption seems on the cards for Mullan's human powder keg, yet Considine's script never makes this a foregone conclusion, in part because the catalyst for change is an encounter with Olivia Colman's charity-shop assistant, whose own horrendous experience of domestic abuse affords Mullan a window of self-knowledge on his previous marital misdeeds. Her husband James (Eddie Marsan), seeming to all and sundry the ideal bourgeois provider but secretly a vicious bully, and Mullan's Joseph, whose upfront aggression is an open book, present different aspects of the weak man overcompensating through domestic oppression; the latter's nickname for his solidly built late spouse – 'tyrannosaur', because her approach, he says, made the crockery shake like something from *Jurassic Park* – nails a fundamental lack of empathy, a sense of objectification, as the root cause of such violence.

For all the pained concentration on masculinity's shadowy hinterlands, however, it's Colman's brave, affecting and always in-the-moment performance that draws us in, allowing us to understand the sufferings of those women who find themselves on the receiving end with nowhere else to go, and complex enough to suggest a fearsome self-preservation which eventually bonds her with Mullan's battle-scarred survivor. One moment stands out: battered and only just holding it together in the back of the charity shop, she snaps right back into superficial sweetness and light at the counter when a customer arrives at this worst possible moment. Considine knows it's the sing-songy tone of her voice that's the emotional killer, and keeps the camera in the back room, prime evidence of a genuinely sensitive directorial touch.

Not without its flaws, *Tyrannosaur* is an auspicious start, and if Considine gains confidence from it, even better may lie ahead.

◆◆ Trevor Johnston



Raining stones: Peter Mullan

SYNOPSIS A documentary about the British reggae subgenre known as lover's rock. Mixing newsreel footage and live performances with interviews with musicians, producers, actors and comedians, the film details the movement's history, cultural context and popularity abroad. Kofi from the trio Brown Sugar explains the 'conscious lovers' offshoot. Sylvia Tella recounts getting her big break by joining the group Boney M. Other participants recall the racism of late 1970s and early 1980s Britain. The crossover success of bands such as UB40 and Culture Club is linked to lovers rock by former Steel Pulse member Mykaell Riley. Young artists Ava Leigh and Lovella Ellis pledge to continue the style.

CREDITS

Producer
Diamid Scrimshaw
Written by
Paddy Considine
Director of Photography
Erik Alexander Wilson
Film Editor
Pia Di Ciaula
Production Designer
Simon Rogers
Music Composed by
Chris Baldwin
Dan Baker
Sound Recordist
Chris Sheedy
Costume Designer
Lance Milligan

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Production Companies
Film4 and the UK Film Council in association with Screen Yorkshire, EM Media and Optimum Releasing present a Warp X / Inflammable Films production for Film4, UK Film Council, Screen Yorkshire, EM Media and Optimum Releasing In Association with Non Stop entertainment AB and Madman A film by Paddy Considine Developed in association with EM Media supported by the National Lottery through the UK Film Council's and Regional Screen Agency's Regional Investment Fund for England and

Film4
Made with the support of the UK Film Councils New Cinema Fund and Yorkshire Forward through Screen Yorkshire Production Fund
Co-financed by Optimum Releasing Limited
Executive Producers
Peter Carlton
Mark Herbert
Katherine Butler
Hugo Heppell
Suzanne Alizart
Will Clarke

CAST

Peter Mullan
Joseph
Olivia Colman
Hannah
Eddie Marsan
James
Ned Dennehy
Tommy
Sally Carman
Marie
Samuel Bottomley
Samuel
Paul Popplewell
Bod
Sian Breckin
Kelly

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

8,311 ft + 8 frames

Ultrasuede In Search of Halston

USA 2010

Director: Whitney Sudler-Smith
Certificate 15 92m 59s

There's a bronze memorial plaque on New York's Seventh Avenue announcing that "the 70s belonged to Halston". This sweeping statement encapsulates everything first-time director Whitney Sudler-Smith finds fascinating about the fashion designer whose clothes and stars-at-Studio-54 lifestyle defined a decade. Bizarrely charming, despite its lightweight, starstruck content, Sudler-Smith's film skims along the surface of Roy Halston Frowick's work and life, bouncing cheerfully through interviews with luminaries such as close friend and longtime client Liza Minnelli and one-time Halston model Anjelica Huston. Self-confessedly ignorant both about American fashion and its history, and keen to gather stories of 1970s sex-and-drugs-and-frock-'n'-roll excess, Sudler-Smith is a gauche but game onscreen presence, blundering through his hard-won interviews with a Louis Theroux-like naivety.

At times he's so gauche, and the interviews so delightfully inept ("So, who's Diana Vreeland?" he asks scandalised fashion guru André Leon Talley, as well as cheekily fingering the hem of Minnelli's Halston trousers) that his bumbling style and beaming ignorance feel like deliberate constructions. Having quickly established that Halston parlayed a career as a New York milliner (he designed Jacqueline Kennedy's much copied pillbox hat for the 1961 inauguration) into a fashion house by 1968, the film settles into a series of enjoyably gossipy but repetitive interviews with anyone who ever knew Halston, their anecdotes worn shiny over decades of retelling. Spliced with archive footage of fashion shows and commercials, the film never becomes more than a frothy, quirky attempt to dip into the designer's glamorous world.

Making little attempt to put Halston's work into any kind of historical or international perspective, the film's lack of intellectual ballast soon tells against it. Halston's haute-couture clothes, seen swishing through parties and down runways, do indeed look startlingly modern and timeless, a parade of clean-lined cashmere, pared-away chiffons and devastatingly simple evening gowns. If you're interested in knowing whether this was a reaction to the costume-party trends of 1960s fashion, or how Michael Kors's minimalist luxury, and Tom Ford's sexy 70s-redux look have kept the Halston style alive, you're plumb out of luck though. What fries the Sudler-Smith onions are tales of decadence on the dance-floor, or hedonism on the sofas at Halston's legendarily wild dinner parties.

Those interviewees from the hard-partying years are surprisingly guarded,

however. Minnelli, who is a fountain of great Halston quotes (he designed her stage clothes around her profuse sweating since "you might as well be shiny all over"), has a touching regard for his posthumous reputation. It's striking, though, how his friends and colleagues define Halston by their own lights – to designers Ralph Rucci and Naeem Khan he's the fabric wizard, to Nicky Haslam a relentless socialite, to Minnelli a wisecracking workaholic. He seems to have had a Gatsby-like facility for reinvention, in friendship, as in his professional life. Oddly, for a man whose name was liberally licensed over American goods at the height of his fame, it was his very ubiquity that caused his downfall. The film is acute, for once, about how his 1983 lower-price line for J.C. Penney – the kind of alliance that's routine for couturiers nowadays – destroyed the credibility of his luxury brand. Halston, the man whose moniker could sell anything, finally lost the right to design under his own name, which belonged to a giant corporation. "I'm going to do a line and call it Guess Who," was his typically wry response.

♦♦ **Kate Stables**

CREDITS

Produced by
Whitney Sudler-Smith
Anne Goursaud
Adam Bardach
Tim Maloney
Nicholas Simon
Written by
Whitney Sudler-Smith
Anne Goursaud
Director of Photography
Scott Miller
Edited by
John Paul Horstmann
Original Music
Christopher Franke
Edgar Rothenrich

Production Sound Recordist
Irin Strauss

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Production Company
Vainglorious Pictures
Executive Producers
Shawn Simon
Mark Urman

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Verve Pictures

8,368 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS New York, present day. Director Whitney Sudler-Smith interviews Liza Minnelli, André Leon Talley, Anjelica Huston, Diane von Furstenberg and others about the life and lifestyle of 1970s fashion designer Halston (1932-1990). The film traces his rise from 1960s milliner, making hats for Jacqueline Kennedy, to the 1973 'Battle of Versailles' fashion show which established him internationally as a master of minimalist luxe. Dressing celebrities and making widespread product-licensing deals made him a household name throughout the 1970s, as did his Ultrasuede shirtdress. Interviewees discuss his creativity and, more guardedly, his social ubiquity, especially at disco Studio 54, and his hedonistic lifestyle with his partner, the artist and window-dresser Victor Hugo. Halston's high-end brand was damaged by the 1983 introduction of a disastrous lower-price line for J.C. Penney stores, and his partying lifestyle took its toll. In 1984 he was fired from his own company, by the corporation that owned it. Forbidden to work under his own name, he stopped designing. Halston died in San Francisco in March 1990 of Aids-related cancer.

Warrior

USA 2011

Director: Gavin O'Connor
Certificate 12A 139m 43s

Gavin O'Connor's big-hearted new film isn't the first to reset the old-fashioned drama of the beleaguered boxer in the brave new world of mixed-martial-arts fighting. A few years back, David Mamet's *Redbelt* featured a koan-spouting MMA instructor and zeroed in on the sport's clutches and releases as metaphors for narrative and existential slipknots. The featured fighters of *Warrior*, estranged brothers Tommy and Brendan, are more traditional underdogs for whom the stakes of masculinity feel visceral and urgent, grounded in the total physical commitment required by this extreme pursuit. O'Connor orchestrates a surprisingly rousing, full-bore melodrama, headlong in its acceptance of its protagonists' need to prove themselves and find meaning, consumed by codes of honour, self-worth and family.

The brothers begin their quests for victory while in the throes of emotional defeat. Tommy (Tom Hardy) is a ferociously solitary Iraq War veteran who reappears after a mysterious absence with a cold determination to win the multimillion-dollar Sparta MMA competition in Atlantic City. He seeks out their ex-trainer, ex-alcoholic father Paddy (grizzlemeister Nick Nolte, sometimes more compelling than his co-stars even when silent), and pointedly asks for help with fight preparation, not familial reconciliation. Brendan (Joel Edgerton), himself a former fighter, struggles to support his wife and family as a physics teacher; crippled by mortgage debt, he too enters the tournament.

Tommy and Brendan wend their way towards the ultimate destiny of meeting in the ring – an inevitability as sure and nonetheless true as the reunion of long-lost lovers in a classic weepie or embittered siblings in Greek tragedy. Before that can happen, Tommy will dole out vindictive abuse to their father, who neglected them as children before becoming a teetotaler (and devoted listener to *Moby Dick* on audiobook!). And Brendan will try and fail to hide his plans from his wife (Jennifer Morrison of *House*) and his school, all the while wondering about the fate of his brother. The Australian Edgerton looks the part of the good American son, while British ex-Bronson Hardy (sans moustache) browns it up as the ominous solitary warrior with eyes on the prize.

The contemporary, MMA setting updates the tropes of the boxing picture. Tommy gets a reputation when he fells a certified champ during a sparring session and the footage goes viral on YouTube; both brothers are flung into the media hype surrounding the Sparta competition, part of the hyperbolic litany, trash-talking and redundant narration recited by sports commentators. It's a modern, unnecessary crutch for tying together stakes and fates, but also an

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF LOVE EXPOSURE & COLD FISH

A
SONG
SKIN
'S
FILM

GUILTY OF ROMANCE

EUREKA ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS "GUILTY OF ROMANCE" WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY SION SIONO
STARRING MIKI NAKANO MAKOTO TUGASHI MEIKUN KAGURAZAKA KANA TSUDA RYO HAMAMATSU RYUJI KOBAYASHI SHINGO GOTSUKA MOTOKI FUKAMI MARIE MACHIDA HISAKO OKADA
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS KENJIRO TODA TOSHIMICHI OTSUKA PRODUCED BY NAZUKI KUNIZANE PRODUCED BY YOSHINOBU CHIBA NIOBUHIRO KIZUKA CINEMATOGRAPHY BY SOHEI TANIGUCHI COSTUME DESIGNER YASUHIRO KANEKO SOUND MIXER SHUNJI HATANABE SET DESIGNER YOSHIO YAMADA ARTIST AKIHIRO NAKAMURA MUSIC DIRECTOR YASUHIRO MOTOYAMA
SCRIPT DESIGN BY MASATOSHI SATO EDITED BY JUNICHI ITO EXECUTIVE PRODUCER CHRYSE HAKAMADA EXECUTIVE PRODUCER RIE KAJIYAMA EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MAYUMI FUKUDA EXECUTIVE PRODUCER NAOKI KOMURO PRODUCED BY NIKKATSU KING RECORD CO., LTD. PRODUCTION COMPANY LAANGI FILM CO-PRODUCTION NIKKATSU STUDIO JAPAN MUSIC CORPORATION NIKKATSU CORPORATION
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Starter for ten: Tom Hardy

understandable bit of stage-setting from the director of *Miracle* (2004), which recounted the US ice-hockey team's surprise upset of the Soviet Union in the 1980 Olympics.

By the time the winner-takes-all Sparta competition takes place, the film has instilled a need in the audience for the cathartic release of the fights (which somehow wipe out awareness of the heavyweight 139-minute running time). O'Connor compiles and adapts the *Rocky* films (substituting Pittsburgh for Philadelphia) and filters mindset through fighting style: Tommy's a Tyson-esque whirlwind who marches out of the ring a few seconds after

whomping his opponent; Brendan's a smaller, patient, even thoughtful chooser of moments who endures blows and chokeholds from opponents such as the feared Russian fighter Koba.

Like another recent attempt to redramatise the fight genre, *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), *Warrior* pivots on family (and echoes *Redbelt* in its clean ending). The drama is at times overblown, wilfully so, but the anything-goes ethos of MMA becomes its own potent expression of the symbolic sacrifice these men have embraced: laying their entire bodies on the line, staking all when it seems nothing else is left. **Nicolas Rapold**

Weekender

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Karl Golden
Certificate 15 89m 54s

There's nothing intrinsically interesting about taking drugs and dancing to loud music. Arguably, in fact, the experience of doing it should be as uninteresting as possible, if your aim is a hypnotic escape into a mindless chaos of flashing colours and sweaty bodies: there's less narrative and nuance on a properly functioning dance floor than you'd find at a council planning meeting or an averagely busy call centre – which is precisely why people who work in dull offices like to unhitch their complexity-blitzed brains via narcotics and repetitive beats at the weekend. It's also why films about the boring world of work are more and infinitely various, while films about the hip and sexy club scene are few, and always more or less the same.

In 1999's club-based *Human Traffic*, Justin Kerrigan solved this problem by throwing out any notion of a storyline and relying on the various charms of his performers to weave together an easygoing, episodic ensemble piece; Michael Winterbottom's *24 Hour Party People* (2002) touched on the rave scene that developed around the Hacienda in Manchester, but never made the mistake of pretending that was really what the film was about. Here, director Karl Golden falls into the trap of dolloping mood, style and kitsch nostalgia on to the flimsiest of pretexts, causing the whole edifice to wobble dangerously. Actor-turned-screenwriter Chris Coghill ostensibly penned the screenplay, but it feels as if it was plucked out of the air just before the cameras rolled: mindless young ravers Dylan and Matt (Jack O'Connell and Henry Lloyd-Hughes) start running their own club in Manchester, become embroiled with a nasty gangster and have to grow up a bit in order to get themselves out of trouble.

On the plus side, the DIY ricketiness of the acid-house scene and the seedy glamour of pre-superclub nightlife are nicely realised, and there are good performances, especially from Stephen Wight as the London wide boy who shows the Mancunian innocents how to make money out of their hobby, and from Ben Batt as gangster John. Both O'Connell and Zawe Ashton (as ecstasy dealer Sarah) also give eye-catchingly assured performances, though Lloyd-Hughes is miscast: as 'the sensible one' he certainly fits the bill, but he's so clean-cut that you can't imagine him getting past the door of most clubs, let alone necking a handful of pills and gurning his way through an all-nighter.

What the film lacks most of all is any moral compass. Not that we need any lectures about drugs or unlicensed sound systems – but Golden has ended up, perhaps accidentally, highlighting money and violence as the default theme of the piece, and these aren't subjects best tackled on the back of a beer mat. If nasty John's gangster tactics are intended to throw his protagonists'

goodness into relief, the structure fails in the bleakest of ways, since Matt and Dylan's redemption, such as it is, merely involves proving that they are even more violent, connected and swimming in money than their enemies. Always too stupid to be strictly likeable, they are still, we are led to believe, deserving of our sympathy; yet they end up as tainted by brutality, selfishness and greed as their vicious nemesis – proving, if nothing else, the pessimistic old truth that if you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas.

◆◆ Lisa Mullen

CREDITS

Producers
Ian Brady
Stephen Salter
Robert Walak
Screenplay
Chris Coghill
Cinematographer
John Conroy
Editor
Martin Brinkler
Production Designer
Kristian Milsted
Original Score/Music
Orchestration/
Producer
James Edward Barker
Sound Mixers
Henry Milliner
Malcolm Hurst
Costume Designer
Camille Benda

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Production Companies
Momentum Pictures
presents a Benchmark Films production
A Karl Golden film
Executive Producers
Ken McMahon
David Hayman
Mark Jaffray
David Kenyon Thomas

CAST

Jack O'Connell
Dylan
Henry Lloyd-Hughes
Matt

Emily Barclay
Claire
Stephen Wight
Gary Mac
Ben Batt
John the Rat
Tom Meeten
Captain Acid
Zawe Ashton
Sarah
Iain McKee
Peanut
Reuben Johnson
Wee Man
Ali Craig
Bigfoot
Richard Riddell
Craig
Sam Hazeldine
Maunce
Mark Sheals
Nigel
Robert 'Biggie' Ofungi
Biggie
Dean Andrews
Sergeant Thompson

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Momentum Pictures
8,091 ft +0 frames

CREDITS

Produced by
Gavin O'Connor
Greg O'Connor
Screenplay
Gavin O'Connor
Anthony Tambakis
Cliff Dorman
Story
Gavin O'Connor
Cliff Dorman
Director of Photography
Masanobu Takayanagi
Edited by
John Gilroy
Sean Albertson
Matt Chessé
Aaron Marshall
Production Designer
Dan Leigh
Music
Mark Isham
Sound Re-recording Mixers

Gary Summers
Christian P. Minkler
Costume Designer
Abigail Murray
Stunt Co-ordinator/Fight Choreographer
JJ 'Loco' Perry

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Production Companies
Lionsgate and Miramax
Schur Pictures present
a Lionsgate/Miramax
Schur Pictures
production
A Solaris Entertainment
and Filmtribe
production
A film by Gavin
O'Connor
Made possible with the
support of the
Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania and the

Pennsylvania Film Office
Executive Producers
Michael Paseornek
Lisa Ellzey
David Mirman
Jordan Schur
John J. Kelly

CAST

Joel Edgerton
Brendan Conlon
Tom Hardy
Tommy Conlon
Jennifer Morrison
Tess Conlon
Frank Grillo
Frank Campana
Nick Nolte
Paddy Conlon
Denzel Whitaker
Stephon
Bryan Callen
himself
Kevin Dunn

Principal Zito
Maximiliano
Hernandez
Colt Boyd
Sam Sheridan
himself
Fernando Funan Chein
Fenroy
Jake McLaughlin
Mark Bradford

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour
2.35:1 [Panavision]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK
12,574 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS Pittsburgh, the present. Iraq War veteran Tommy Conlon pays a surprise visit to his ex-alcoholic father Paddy, and demands he train him for the forthcoming Sparta mixed-martial-arts championship in Atlantic City. Struggling to make ends meet working as a physics teacher, Tommy's estranged brother Brendan also decides to enter the championship, despite the objections of his wife Tess.

Tommy knocks down a celebrated champion during a sparring session; footage of the fight spreads via YouTube, securing him a place in the Sparta competition. Brendan, a former fighter, trains and wins a spot in the contest too; he faces the prospect of being fired from his teaching job as a result, but Tess now supports his effort. Tommy and Brendan meet at a beach, but Tommy – who has hectored Paddy back into drinking – has little interest in reconciliation.

At the winner-takes-all competition, Tommy and Brendan are both rated as underdogs. Tommy's secret past as a deserter from the military confuses many observers and raises the possibility of his arrest. But Tommy dispatches his opponents with knockouts, while Brendan slowly but surely wins his bouts, even against a seemingly unbeatable Russian named Koba. The final fight is between Tommy and Brendan; Brendan wins.

SYNOPSIS Manchester, 1990. Young ne'er-do-wells Matt and Dylan fund their weekends of illegal raving through a part-time career in petty crime. They decide to move into organising their own warehouse parties. Initially motivated by a desire to hold the best raves, they enlist a pirate DJ called Captain Acid to promote their events. A visit from London promoter Gary Mac and a trip to Ibiza encourage them to think bigger. As word gets around about their club nights, local gangster John decides to take over. Threatening violence, he controls the door, the dealing and finally the music, leaving Matt and Dylan to fight among themselves – not only about John but also about Claire, a girl they've both slept with, and whom Matt loves. John hospitalises one of their friends and threatens to kill Dylan. The boys flee with Claire to Amsterdam; teaming up with Gary Mac they arrange for John to get a severe beating.

Matt and Claire, who is expecting a baby, leave raving behind to start a new life in the sun with the fortune Matt has made.

We Need to Talk About Kevin

United Kingdom/USA 2010
Director: Lynne Ramsey
Certificate 15 112m 3s

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Lynne Ramsey's first film since *Morvern Callar* (2002) might have been *The Lovely Bones*, which she read as an unfinished

manuscript, had it not served up such a gloopy vision of the afterlife that blockbuster status was suddenly thrust upon it. (We all know how that panned out – "like My Little Pony", in her own words.) Few such consolations are on offer in Lionel Shriver's novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, even if it takes the form of epistolary therapy for its narrator, Eva Khatchadourian, after her son perpetrates a high-school massacre. The grim ironies of this format – specifically, what exonerated Eva means to gain from her husband Franklin, to whom her letters are addressed – only become clear at the novel's finish, scuppering and practically mocking any hope of 'closure'.

Ramsay and her writing partner Rory Kinnear (not to be confused with the British stage actor) forge ahead radically, stripping away the entire literary conceit without even the vestigial trace of voiceover. The film begins with the image of net curtains flapping in the night, and a helicopter-like swishing on the soundtrack which recurs almost tauntingly until we identify it as the work of a garden sprinkler-system. The curtains are a literal veil over the worst of what Kevin achieved, one day, with a crossbow, but the delayed reveal is one of the very few structuring decisions lifted straight from the book.

Ramsay's film, particularly in its first third, is instead a jigsaw exercise in disassembly, suggestive of a catastrophe so explosive it has splintered time. We revisit Kevin's conception, birth and traumatic (for his mother, more than him) upbringing, while also dropping in on him in prison, where he plays poker-faced games with Eva's stunned questions. Note that it's 'we', not 'she' – Ramsay's formal choices, especially the implacable sound design and Seamus McGarvey's at-a-remove cinematography, impose an eerie barrier between the ostensible storyteller and her guilt-inflected reminiscences, if you can even call them that. By doing this, the film trumps Shriver's credulity-straining methods of recap, removing control so thoroughly from its main character that she can't even marshal her own flashbacks – they happen to her out of the blue.

Out of the red. It's a colour filmmakers traditionally hold in reserve, banishing it from the frame except to link an ink spill with a dwarf's overcoat. Ramsay applies lashings of the stuff, filling the screen with wasp-attracting jam splurges, or an extended



Maternal flame: Tilda Swinton

reverie with Eva soaked and held aloft, in some halcyon days before pregnancy, at Valencia's La Tomatina festival, or the linked Warholian image of her joylessly trapped against a supermarket wall of tomato soup cans. It's an intentionally excessive motif that seems designed to bait critics, but works precisely as a kind of insult – it's a colour that won't leave Eva in peace. And Ramsay isn't the only one at it: neighbours with a vendetta splash red paint all over Eva's new house and car. The film has a high body-count, rushed trips to casualty, a sister's eye lost to drainage cleaner, and you could easily come away with an impression of over-the-top grand guignol – except that only in the concluding sequence is a single drop of blood visible on screen.

As a prickly, leftist, brunette Armenian-American, Tilda Swinton isn't, prima facie, ideal casting (in fact, you can well imagine an Egoian version with the strident Arsinee Khanjian) but it's hard to imagine a certain kind of effortful, teeth-gritting, fundamentally

reluctant motherhood being nailed much better. Her rictus of faux-cheery striving with the screaming newborn Kevin sets up one of Ramsay's most memorable sequences, which concludes with her hovering with the pram next to some ear-battering road works, filled with near-orgasmic relief at the baby-aggro being drowned out. From squalling infant to malevolent pipsqueak, the younger Kevins are terrific, but it's Ezra Miller (*Afterschool*, *City Island*), with his saturnine sneer and mocking sexuality, who puts Swinton – an actress we tend to think of as in charge, especially when top-billed – excitingly through her paces.

For all Kevin's atrocities, the most stinging moments here are the vituperations of the present-day timeline, where Eva calmly receives a savage slap in the face from a passing mother, or unprotestingly accepts 12 broken eggs at the checkout – another petty act of revenge – and goes home to pick shell out of her omelette as a kind of hair shirt. Underlining the character's stoic use of self-blame as a coping mechanism – it's the only rational explanation she can access for what took place – Ramsay's unsettlingly calm film is really all about Eva. Significant sections of the book dealing with Kevin's school career are prudently abandoned, keeping his sociopathic behaviour in a what-if realm. Any complaints about opaque psychology seem beside the point, as he's meant to be nothing more nor less than the worst child imaginable – kryptonite to almost anyone's mothering instincts.

Tim Robey

CREDITS

Produced by
Luc Roeg
Jennifer Fox
Robert Salerno
Screenplay
Lynne Ramsay
Rory Stewart Kinnear
Based on the novel by
Lionel Shriver
**Director of
Photography**
Seamus McGarvey
Edited by
Joe Bini
Production Designer
Judy Becker
Music Score
Jonny Greenwood
Sound Designer
Paul Davies
Costume Designer
Catherine George

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Independent Film
Productions
**Production
Companies**
BBC Films and UK Film
Council present in
association with
Footprint Investments
LLP, Piccadilly Pictures
and LipSync
Productions an
Independent production
in association with
Artina Films and
Rockinghorse Films
A film by Lynne Ramsay
In association with
Caemhan LLP,
Panaramic LLP, Beryl
Betty LLP and Atlantic
Swiss Production
Developed by BBC
Films
Made with the support

of the UK Film Council's
New Cinema and Film
Funds
Executive Producers
Steven Soderbergh
Christine Langan
Paula Jaffon
Christopher Figg
Robert Whitehouse
Michael Robinson
Andrew Orr
Norman Merry
Lisa Lambert
Lynne Ramsay
Tilda Swinton

CAST

Tilda Swinton
Eva
John C. Reilly
Franklin
Ezra Miller
Kevin, teenager
Jasper Newell
Kevin, 6-8 years

Rocky Duer
Kevin, toddler
Ashley Gerasimovich
Celia
Siobhan Fallon Hogan
Wanda
Alex Manette
Colin
Kenneth Franklin
Soweto

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

10,084 ft +8 frames

When China Met Africa

United Kingdom/France/The Netherlands/Switzerland/Finland/Sweden/Norway/USA 2010
Directors: Marc Francis, Nick Francis

The speed and scale of China's post-1980s economic expansion and the extent of its investment abroad, especially in Africa, has been a frequent topic of debate, but it's usually conducted at the national level. The value of Nick and Marc Francis's documentary is that it shows how international trade agreements signed between Chinese and Zambian officials affect people on the ground. The recent BBC documentary *The Chinese Are Coming* also did this, but in the form of a personal thesis that presented a quasi-colonial relationship between China and various client states: reporter Justin Rowlett's subjects were almost exclusively non-Chinese. By contrast, *When China Met Africa* demonstrates that it's not just Africans who end up exploited and disappointed.

Indeed, two of the film's three central figures are Chinese. Former salaryman Liu Changming came to Zambia in search of entrepreneurial independence, but while he seems superficially wealthy (he's acquired three farms and is contemplating a fourth), this isn't reflected by his standard of living, or the fact that he drives to Lusaka's city market himself to sell his produce. But given his mutually mistrustful, often fractious relationship with his poorly paid workers, it's easy to see why he prefers to keep things within his family – though his daughter openly dreams of doing something else.

Financial issues also bedevil Li Jianguo, a loyal employee of China Henan International Cooperation Group charged with project-managing the construction of a 323km road between Serenje and Mansa. Despite universal and repeated agreement that the road is an essential artery, the government has failed to meet its financial commitments, with knock-on effects on working conditions – Li wants to do a professional job but is forced to feed his demoralised employees rations that don't look much more appetising than the slurry they're spreading over the road after repairing its many potholes. When an accident leads to a small oil spill, they rush to grab plastic cans, recognising an unexpected perk.

Although the film eavesdrops on several conversations between Zambian workers, the country's main representative is at the other end of the socioeconomic scale. The affable, beaming Felix Mutati is Minister for Trade, Commerce and Industry, a job that involves making regular trips to China (he's seen attending trade fairs in Xiamen and Changsha), mainly to promote Zambia's mining industry, the source of much of its natural wealth. He says that the thing he appreciates most about doing business with the Chinese

SYNOPSIS Grieving wife and mother Eva Khatchadourian, a former travel writer, tries to start a new life in the aftermath of a horrific massacre perpetrated by her teenage son Kevin in high school.

In flashbacks we see that from birth the relationship between mother and son is highly combative. He is obstinately slow to communicate and refuses to respond to potty training. His father Franklin is more patient and tolerant than Eva. They move into a bigger house. Eva decorates her study with the map collection she's painstakingly compiled, and Kevin squirts ink all over it with a water pistol. Eva becomes pregnant with their second baby without telling Franklin. This child, Celia, is timid and does everything Kevin says. Celia's pet shrew disappears and there's a simultaneous sink blockage. Celia loses her left eye in an accident with drain cleaner while Kevin is babysitting; Eva denies having left the drain cleaner out of its cupboard, and suspects Kevin. Franklin buys Kevin a crossbow for his 16th birthday. Kevin buys D-locks from the internet, claiming that he's selling them for profit at school. Instead he traps nine students in the gym and shoots them. When Eva comes home that evening, she finds Franklin and Celia dead in the garden.

Two years after the massacre, as Kevin transfers to an adult prison, Eva continues to visit him intermittently.

is the speed of decision-making compared with the bureaucratic hurdles imposed by Western firms and government – but the film implicitly highlights the downsides.

'Implicitly' because, unlike Rowlett's documentary, *When China Met Africa* has no commentary. In fact, the Francis brothers often had little idea of exactly what they were filming, as few conversations were conducted in English or Mandarin (which Marc Francis speaks). So it wasn't until the raw footage had been processed by translators that they were able to find both the immediate stories and the wider light they shed on what isn't so much overt neocolonialism as a long-term plan to amass as much of the world's dwindling raw materials as possible, paying scant attention to the feelings of people at the sharp end, be they local or immigrant. The mood most frequently encountered is one of resigned acceptance: even Mutati recognises that he's a minuscule cog in a machine of almost inconceivable size, whose direction he is essentially powerless to affect.

Michael Brooke

CREDITS

Produced by

Marc Francis

Nick Francis

Written by

Marc Francis

Nick Francis

Camera

Marc Francis

Edited by

Hugh Williams

Music

Florence Di Concilio

Sound

Nick Francis

Production Companies

@Speak-It Productions

Ltd, ZETA Productions,

ARTE France

Production Companies

Speak-It Films and Zeta

Productions in

association with ARTE

France, BBC and VPRO

a film by Marc Francis

and Nick Francis

Co-produced with ARTE

France

In association with BBC

and VPRO

With the participation of

Télévision Suisse

Romande - TSR (Irène

Challand, Gaspard

Lamunère), YLE TV1

(Riitta Pihlajamäki), SVT

(Axel Arno), NRK (Tore

Tønner), Canal France

International (Margaret

Goubin)

Made with the support

of PROCIREP - Société

des Producteurs,

LANGOA, CNC - Centre

National de la

Cinématographie,

WORLDVIEW

Broadcast Media

Scheme, MEDIA

Programme of the

European Union,

Sundance Institute -

Documentary Fund

Executive Producer

Miriana Bojic-Waller

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Speak-It Media

SYNOPSIS This documentary about Chinese investments in Zambia begins with the China-Africa Cooperation Summit held in Beijing in 2006.

Zambia, 2009. Liu Changming runs Tian Xiang Farm. Li Jianguo is the project manager supervising the construction of the 323km Serenje-Mansa road. Felix Mutati, Minister of Trade, Commerce and Industry, visits trade fairs in Xiamen and Changsha. After ten chickens are stolen, Liu decreases his Zambian workers' pay. As Mutati signs another high-profile trade agreement, Li is forced to down tools after the Zambian government releases only 30 per cent of promised funds. Liu decides that charcoal will be more profitable than chickens, and vows to stay in Zambia, to leave his children an inheritance.

Will

United Kingdom/
Panama/Turkey 2011

Director: Ellen Perry

"Never let fear get in the way of your dreams." This is the advice proffered to 11-year-old Will (Perry Eggleton) by his father Gareth (Damian Lewis) shortly before the latter's unexpected death. It's a mantra that's later repeated by the youngster to ex-footballer and surrogate father-figure Alek (Kristian Kiehling) in this sentimental triumph-of-the-underdog tale from American writer-director Ellen Perry. The film ends with archival images of Liverpool players and supporters celebrating the club's remarkable victory in the 2005 UEFA Champions League Final. Thus Perry, whose previous credits include the documentaries *The Great Wall Across the Yangste* (2000) and *The Fall of Fujimori* (2005), has a real-life sporting 'miracle' (Liverpool were 3-0 down against opponents AC Milan before winning on penalties) to reinforce her fictional family film's championing of perseverance in the face of adversity.

Perry has said that she and co-screenwriter Zack Anderson were inspired to write *Will* by the passion they witnessed in English fans during televised matches. Certainly football is cast here in the most benevolent of lights: it binds generations (Gareth reminisces about watching Liverpool with his docker father, then bursts into a lusty rendition of the club anthem 'You'll Never Walk Alone'); Reds fans on the way to a match in Istanbul instantly welcome young Will into their fold, organising a whip-round outside the sun-drenched Atatürk Stadium to ensure he secures a black-market ticket.

Parallels between sporting and religious faith are clearly drawn: Will's shrine to his beloved club jostles for wall space in the dormitory at his Catholic school alongside crucifixes and portraits of the Virgin Mary; a climactic journey through the tunnel on to the pitch has an epiphanic feel, thanks to the combination of swelling music, the crowd's chanting and white light filling the frame, plus the presence of footballing stars Kenny Dalglish, Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher.

Attractively photographed by regular Stephen Frears cinematographer Oliver Stapleton, *Will* can be read as a Dickensian fairytale. Its orphaned protagonist escapes a repressive

institution and embarks on a picaresque adventure during which he is robbed by pickpockets and then assisted by mysterious benefactors, notably Bosnian émigré Alek and middle-aged Frenchman Mathieu. The film's construction of its hero's educational world is, however, much closer to Harry Potter than Ken Loach. Pre-teen pupils converse knowledgeably about astronomy, Einstein and the Magna Carta, and plot their friend's daring escape with the aid of model soldiers.

Credibly conveying Will's vulnerability and determination, newcomer Eggleton holds his own alongside such dependable presences as Lewis and Bob Hoskins, the latter cameoing as a kindly publican. Throughout, though, the script struggles to balance the story's tragic elements with a desire to uplift the viewer's spirits. The most ill-judged interlude involves Will accompanying Alek to a village in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where we learn in flashback of a fatal incident from ten years earlier. It's a cumbersome way to shoulder an adult character with a past trauma, which of course must be swiftly overcome in the quest for feelgood closure.

Tom Dawson

CREDITS

Produced by

Taha Altayli

Ellen Perry

Zack Anderson

Mark Cooper

Timothy Nicholas

Screenplay

Zack Anderson

Ellen Perry

Director of

Photography

Oliver Stapleton

Edited by

Lesley Walker

Brenna Rangolt

Production Designer

James Merfield

Music

Nigel Clarke

Michael Csányi-Willis

Sound Designer

Niv Adiri

Costume Designer

Lindsay Pugh

©Strangelove Films

Limited and Madouc

Holdings, Inc.

Production Companies

Galata Films presents a

Strangelove Films

production

Executive Producers

Stephen Moffitt

Stewart Till

Mustafa Karahan

CAST

Damian Lewis

Gareth

Kristian Kiehling

Alek

Alice Krige

Sister Carmel

Brandon Robinson

Richie

Kieran Wallbanks

Simon

Nicolas Chagrin

Mathieu

Ralph Amoussou

Serge

Kenny Dalglish

Steven Gerrard

Jamie Carragher

themselves

Bob Hoskins

Davey

Perry Eggleton

Will Brennan

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Vertigo Films

The Woman

USA 2011

Director: Lucky McKee

Adapted from their novel by director Lucky McKee and cult horror author Jack Ketchum, *The Woman* arrives with a frisson of advance notoriety, largely thanks to a viral clip of a revolted festival punter's noisy walkout (and subsequent plea for the film to be confiscated) during a Sundance screening. The clip's veracity sparked debate – was it a genuine reaction or an elaborate PR stunt? Whatever the case, the fuss is mostly unwarranted – McKee's film is determinedly abrasive and spring-loaded with cheap provocations, but it's executed in a cack-handed, self-consciously off-kilter manner that soon grows enervating.

The eponymous main character, played with zeal by Pollyanna McIntosh, featured briefly in an earlier Ketchum adaptation, *Offspring* (2009), as one of a clan of feral cannibals terrorising the Maine coastline. Here, she's a solitary forest dweller – until, that is, country lawyer Chris Cleek (Sean Bridgers) catches her in the crosshairs of his hunting rifle and is aroused rather than shocked by his discovery – the first inkling that something is deeply amiss with this ostensibly banal family man. (It's a sequence that brings to mind gender theorist Carol Clover's definition of the 'assaultive gaze' in horror mechanics.) We quickly learn that Chris is a warped, authoritarian misogynist who cows his timorous wife Belle (Angela Bettis) into near-catatonia, most likely abuses his wan teenage daughter, and proves an increasingly disturbing role model to his impressionable adolescent son. Capturing the woman, Chris chains her up in his basement, declaring to his dumbstruck family that he plans to 'civilise' her (one of the rare scenes to succeed, its pregnant awkwardness working as pitch-black comedy). Telegraphing the grisly horrors to come, the woman promptly bites off Chris's finger. His indignant response – "That is not civilised behaviour!" – typifies McKee and Ketchum's tendency to spell out their hardly radical subtext (that the evils concealed behind the facade of respectable society are far worse than the forthright savagery embodied by the woman).

As the prisoner endures numerous humiliations, McKee's gigantic close-ups of McIntosh's bloodied, filthy face appear designed to raise hackles. But it seems wide of the mark to accuse the film of misogyny, as some critics have. Its male protagonists are uniformly repugnant, with even minor characters – such as the boys tormenting a lone girl in a schoolyard – part and parcel of the problem. And it's obvious from minute one that the woman will ultimately wreak vengeance, as is duly confirmed in the grand guignol finale. What does seem dubious is the inclusion of a ludicrously glamorous schoolteacher, McKee's camera prowling lasciviously behind her as if it were Chris himself. There are unsettling moments – Belle

being accused of jealousy as she watches Chris wash the woman, the son spying on his father's violation of the captive – but scenes are thrown together in such a slapdash way that there's little cumulative power. McKee frequently resorts to manipulative editing and lazy sonic affronts in an attempt to raise outrage levels, while the grim events are set in incessant counterpoint to an annoying alt-rock soundtrack. It's a film that goes all out to tread on eggshells, but with little reward.

♦♦ **Matthew Taylor**

CREDITS

Producers
Andrew van den Houten
Robert Tonino
Written by
Jack Ketchum
Lucky McKee based on
their novel
**Director of
Photography**
Alex Vender
Edited by
Zach Passero
Production Design
Krista Gall
Music
Sean Spillane
Sound Design
Andrew Smetek
Costume Design
Michael Bevins
Sandra Alexandre

©Modern Woman LLC
Modernine presents
Executive Producers
Albert Podell
Frank Olsen
Arrien Schillkamp
Loren Semmens

CAST

Polyanna McIntosh
the woman
Sean Bridgers
Chris Cleek
Angela Bettis
Belle Cleek
Lauren Ashley Carter
Peggy Cleek
Carlee Baker
Miss Genevieve Raton
Alexa Marcigiano
Socket
Zach Rand
Brian Cleek
Shyla Molhusen
Darlin' Cleek
Brandon Gerald Fuller
baby
Chris Krzykowski
Roger
Marcia Bennett
Deanna
Vincent Gordon
Clapp boy

In Colour
[L851]

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

The Yellow Sea

South Korea 2010

Director: Na Hong-jin

Certificate 18 140m 9s

South Korean writer-director Na Hong-jin made a splash at home and abroad with his 2008 debut, the Seoul-set serial-killer suspense *The Chaser*. There's once again plenty in the way of pursuit in this expansive second feature, which brings the region's geographic and ethnic complications into play in a distinctive fish-out-of-water thriller.

The Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture on the Chinese side of the North Korean border is home to a significant population of ethnic Koreans known as Joseonjok, many of whom – if the film's opening intertitle is to be believed – are involved in illicit activities, seemingly predicated on the relative proximity of South Korea. Na's steely protagonist Gu-nam is a Yanji City cab driver with serious gambling debts who takes up a lucrative criminal assignment to head for Seoul under the official radar – in part for the payday but also to track down his estranged wife, who went south with the notion of sending money back and was never heard from again. A simple in-and-out proves to be anything but, needless to say, as Joseonjok outsider Gu-nam finds himself on the run from the authorities and a sleek big-city mobster. The efficient plot set-up has us rooting for this flawed everyman forced to live by his wits in unfamiliar surroundings, yet it's the vividness of the milieu and the physicality of the action that draw us in as much as the story outline.

The contrast between ratty, shabby Yanji in provincial China, the desolate coastal towns of South Korea and the brightly lit environs of upscale Seoul are captured with an unfussy immediacy, since the restless cutting allows little time for lingering (even less in this director-approved international version, which nips 17 minutes from the Korean release print). Economically and politically these places are worlds apart, yet a dog-eat-dog morality thrives all over: if hatchet-wielding smuggler Myun exemplifies Yanji's frontier spirit, then sharp-dressed businessman/mobster Kim Tae-won reflects the ruthless impulses underpinning a seemingly legitimate Seoul success story.

Na has the police playing catch-up to a semi-comic degree, but it's Gu-nam's in-the-moment alertness that keeps the story sharp, as he negotiates the challenge of staking out his target, tracking down his wife and staying one step ahead of all-comers when his mission goes pear-shaped. As long as the film sticks close by him, displaying an almost Melvillian concentration on process – how to get past a locked grille in an apartment block staircase, for instance – it's gripping stuff, not least when we fear he's not going to make it to the fishing boat that will return him to the sanctuary of Yanji.

The film's extended running-time suggests there's only so far Gu-nam can run before the narrative sets out



Crossing the border: 'The Yellow Sea'

to wrong-foot us again. That the shift in approach takes place after a full-blooded urban car chase in which Na abandons the precise *mise en scène* of previous action highlights for a dismayingly approximate suggestion of noise and movement is an indication that things are beginning to go awry. It's always a precarious undertaking to have the protagonist morph motivations mid-movie, and the shift towards a noble quest to find out who ordered the hit that Gu-nam was meant to carry out brings an extra 40 minutes of mayhem at the expense of sagging interest. There's a snap and a swagger to Na's direction throughout, but his screenplay overreaches itself, even if there's some crunching individual confrontations and a startlingly pessimistic finale still to come.

The cast, though, deliver for him. Having given us a truly unsettling cold-blooded slayer in *The Chaser*, Ha Jung-woo brings a sinewy humanity to Gu-nam, even if he's powerless to stop co-star Kim Yun-seok stealing the show as Myun, the formidable crime kingpin who solves his problems with an axe; somehow this slightly portly performer convinces us by sheer don't-mess-with-me charisma, and provides yet more proof of current Korean cinema's talent for showcasing intriguing character types rather than the usual pretty-boy leads. Reuniting *The Chaser*'s writer-director and lead actors Ha and Kim was clearly worth doing, though this film's propensity for over-elaboration eventually proves their undoing. Let's hope they get stuck into a lean and mean 90-minute thriller next time round. ♦♦ **Trevor Johnston**

CREDITS

Producer
Han Sung-soo
Written by
Na Hong-jin
Screenplay
Adaptation
Hong Won-chan
Cinematographer
Lee Sung-je
Editing
Kim Sun-min
Production Designer
Lee Hwo-kyoung
Music
Jang Young-gyu
Lee Byung-hoon
Sound Supervisors
Choi Tae-yeon
Lee Seung-yup
Costume Designer
Chae Kyung-hwa

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Popcorn Film
**Production
Companies**
Presented by Wellmade
STARM in association
with
Showbox/Mediaplex,
Inc., Fox International
Productions, Popcorn
Film
Produced by Popcorn
Film in association with
Michigan Venture
Capital, Inc., Asia
Culture Technology
Investment, Inc.,
Gemini Investment
Corporation, Inc.
Supported by Seoul
Metropolitan
Government, Seoul Film
Commission, Location
Incentive Program of

Busan Film
Commission, Korea
Trade Insurance
Corporation, Hong
Kong - Asia Film
Financing Forum
Executive Producers
Byun Jong-eun
You Jung-hoon

CAST

Ha Jung-woo
Gu-nam
Kim Yun-seok
Myun Jung-hak
Cho Seong-ha
Kim Tae-won
Lee Chul-min
Choi Sung-nam
Kwak Byoung-kyu
Professor Kim Seung-
hyun

Lim Ye-won
Professor Kim's wife
Tak Sung-eun
Gu-nam's wife
Lee El
Joo-young

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Eureka Entertainment
on behalf of Bounty
Films

12,613 ft +8 frames

South Korean theatrical
title
Hwanghae

SYNOPSIS Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, north-east China, present day. Having run up large gambling debts, taxi driver Gu-Nam accepts shady operator Myun-Ga's offer to smuggle him into South Korea to carry out a well-paid hit. The inducement isn't purely financial: Gu-Nam has not heard from his wife since she left for South Korea.

After a perilous journey across the Yellow Sea in a trawler hold filled with illegal migrants, Gu-Nam heads to Seoul. He finds evidence that his missing wife had a relationship with a volatile fishmonger. Gu-Nam's target, businessman Kim Seng-Hyun, is dispatched by his bodyguard just as Gu-Nam is about to complete his mission. When the victim's wife sees Gu-Nam hack off the thumb he needs as proof for Myun, he becomes the prime suspect and finds himself pursued by the police and also by Kim Tae-Won, the crook who is responsible for the killing and who is now eager to cover his tracks. Kim Tae-Won hires Myun to track Gu-Nam down. Hearing news that his wife's corpse has been found, Gu-Nam visits Kim Seng-Hyun's widow and swears that he'll find the killer. He realises that Kim Tae-Won is responsible. Surviving a violent showdown with Myun and Kim Tae-Won, Gu-Nam discovers that it was the widow's lover who asked Myun to hire him as a hitman. Gu-Nam dies of his wounds on his way home across the Yellow Sea. His wife returns alive.

The way of the samurai

A fierce and thrilling critique of notions of honour, 'Harakiri' is, says **Michael Brooke**, one of the greatest of all Japanese films

Harakiri

Kobayashi Masaki; Japan 1962; Certificate 15; 133 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1
Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region 2 NTSC DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Features: Kobayashi Masaki interview, trailer, booklet.

Criterion/Region A Blu-ray; Features: introduction by Donald Richie, interviews with Kobayashi Masaki, Nakadai Tatsuya and Hashimoto Shinobu, trailer, booklet

Kobayashi Masaki's first samurai film is one of the genre's major masterpieces, not least for its exploration and criticism of the ritual facades governing the samurai code of honour – if notions of 'honour' can legitimately be applied to what is forensically exposed as a viciously hypocritical system that renders men penniless and children fatherless thanks to an unbending refusal to take context and individual circumstance into account.

It's set in 1630, a time of peace that proves paradoxically disastrous for the samurai who contributed to the Tokugawa shogunate's victory during prolonged civil conflict. Deprived of their very *raison d'être*, many former samurai have been forced to become wandering ronin, explicitly forbidden to take on any other kind of employment (one is seen fruitlessly queuing for a labouring job) and treated with widespread mistrust. Desperate to stave off starvation, they devise a scam that involves presenting themselves at the gates of the fortresses of the few extant clans, demanding their right as samurai to commit harakiri (or, more accurately, seppuku, the film's Japanese title) with all the attendant pomp and ceremony.

In most cases, the supplicants are contemptuously paid off (which of course was their intended outcome), but on one occasion the Iyi clan's senior counsellor Saito Kageyu (Mikuni Rentaro) decides to assert his authority in his leader's absence by insisting that Chijiiwa Motome (Ishihama Akira) goes through with the ceremony, even when it becomes clear that not only does Chijiiwa not want to do it, but he even lacks the necessary equipment, having sold his two samurai swords some time earlier and replaced them with bamboo facsimiles. Unmoved, Saito insists that he use them instead.

This early scene and its barely watchable conclusion presents Kobayashi's anti-feudal argument in kernel form, but the bulk of the surrounding narrative remains to be fleshed out by the older samurai Tugumo Hanshiro (Nakadai Tatsuya).



Fighting spirit: 'Harakiri'

Saito initially assumes that he intends to pull off the same trick as Chijiiwa, but as Tugumo gradually reveals his motives in lacerating detail, it becomes clear that he has a very different outcome in mind. A few drops of agreeably dark comedy (three supposedly fearless warriors all pull unexpected sickies for the same reason) leaven an inexorable accretion of human tragedy that turns positively Shakespearean well before the end.

Kobayashi's control of this material is masterly throughout. Most of cinematographer Miyajima Yoshio's widescreen compositions are, like Nakadai's unnervingly calm basso delivery, deceptively measured and tranquil, the camera gliding serenely through the Iyi clan's various rooms before coming to rest in the courtyard where much of the drama takes place. The ritualistic staging is deliberately contrasted with the horrors unveiled in flashback by Tugumo's deceptively calm narrative: after so much tension, the climactic swordfights come as cathartic relief.

The film's production coincided with a revival of interest in traditional Japanese musical instruments that had fallen out of favour after the war, and Takemitsu Toru's score is quite unlike that of Hayazaki Fumio's more westernised accompaniments to earlier samurai films by Kurosawa and Mizoguchi. He makes particularly eloquent use of the biwa, or Japanese lute, whether plucked to emphasise individual gestures or

The inexorable accretion of human tragedy turns positively Shakespearean

strummed continuously as a background to a more elaborate set piece.

Eureka's Masters of Cinema strand and the Criterion Collection are releasing 'Harakiri' on Blu-ray more or less simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic, presumably to take advantage of the imminent release of Miike Takashi's 3D remake. Each edition is region-locked to its respective territory, and has been sourced from the same Shochiku high-definition master. Eureka has opted to present the material as supplied, while Criterion has made some small tonal adjustments and slightly cropped the image at the sides and bottom. Framing issues aside, the picture on both versions is superb. The opening shots of smoke swirling around a display of ceremonial armour topped with a fine-haired white wig (the hollowness of head and body a symbol of the rot at the Iyi clan's heart) are demonstration-quality, and the rest of the film is all but immaculate.

Common to both releases is a 1993 interview with an affable but modest Kobayashi, conducted by his markedly more voluble younger colleague Shinoda Masahiro. The booklets are structurally similar if textually different, offering analytical essays by Philip Kemp (Eureka) or Joan Mellen (Criterion) and a Kobayashi interview (from 1963 or 1972, respectively). Unique to Criterion are video interviews with Nakadai and screenwriter Hashimoto Shinobu and an introduction by veteran Japanese cinema expert Donald Richie, while Masters of Cinema offers a supplementary DVD in the same package, duplicating the Blu-ray disc's contents (Criterion's 2005 DVD does the same job, but has to be purchased separately). But in either version, these discs offer a near-perfect showcase for what is still undoubtedly one of the greatest of all Japanese films.

Films by Claude Chabrol

Le Beau Serge

France 1958; Criterion Collection/Region 1; 99 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary, making-of documentary, segment from 1969 episode of French TV series in which Chabrol revisits film's locations, theatrical trailer

Les Cousins

France 1959; Criterion Collection/Region 1; 109 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary, theatrical trailer, booklet featuring excerpts from Jean-Claude Brialy's memoir

Films: *Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins* were self-produced by Claude Chabrol with money from his first wife Agnès Goutte. This small coup gave *Serge*, made when Chabrol was 27, the eternal distinction of being the first feature from a *Cahiers du cinéma* writer – thus arguably the first swell of the New Wave.

The films are twin likenesses: both star Gérard Blain and Jean-Claude Brialy; both detail curiously intense male friendships and their internal power plays; and in both, the relationships are rekindled by the arrival of an out-of-town party – the point at which each film begins. In *Serge*, Brialy is François, a tubercular college student recuperating for the winter in his hometown (also Chabrol's) of rural Sardin, where he finds that his boyhood friend Serge, played by Blain, has become a desperately unhappy, plonk-for-breakfast lush. Right off, *Serge* soaks up the ambient life of a living village with long walk-and-talk shots through the streets, Chabrol's documentary impulse peaking with the rough verity of a dance-night scene. *Cousins* has perfectly filmed parties too, but with the sheen of a privileged Parisian setting. Blain is country cousin Charles, who comes to board with Brialy's Paul – a sybaritic, bohemian law student, playfully satanic with goatee and cane – as they both prepare for their exams, Charles through monastic study, Paul through endless partying.

In each film, the visitor is effaced by grinding contact with a social system he neither fully understands nor can adapt to. In *Serge*, François vainly strives against predeterministic village attitudes; in *Cousins*, Charles's provincial sincerity leaves him vulnerable to the inconsequentiality of Paul's fast-company circle, iron-clad in their worldliness. There is also the small matter of a contended-for woman – Bernadette Lafont's fetching jailbait in *Serge*, Juliette Mayniel's Latin-quarter heartbreaker in *Cousins*. (The latter film marks the beginning of Chabrol's collaboration with co-writer Paul Gégau, with whom he would extensively rework such triangular formulations in years to come.) Finally, in each film there's the sense that too much involvement can be fatal, and in *Serge* Lafont gives Brialy an early definition of Chabrol's detachment: "It's funny. You observe us as if we were insects."

Discs: On *Beau Serge*, two featurettes show Chabrol revisiting Sardin, 11 and 46 years after filming. (NP)

The Cigarette Girl of Mosselprom

Yuri Zhelyabuzhsky; USSR 1924;
Kino/Region 1 NTSC; 112 minutes;
Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Film: A prototypical Soviet comedy from the era immediately before Eisenstein made feature-filmmaking safe for agitprop montage, this barn-broad farce could've been made almost anywhere.

Co-written by Fyodor Otsep (who that same year co-wrote *Aelita*), the film hones in on a schlubby office worker (Igor Ilyinsky, obviously striving towards a handgrip Chaplin vibe) who, though he is desired by a zaftig secretary, has eyes only for the slender street-corner cigarette girl of the title (Yuliya Solntseva), buying packs from her even though he doesn't smoke. Things are complicated by the intrusion of a film crew led by a wild-haired proto-Eisenstein who decides that Solntseva's salesgirl can and should be a star.

The scenario and stately pacing hew to the international standards; unlike even Russian action serials such as Lev Kuleshov's *The Death Ray* (1925) and Otsep's *Miss Mend* (1926), which play like happily psychotic counterparts to other nations' achievements in that genre, *Mosselprom* doesn't seem distinctively Russian, much less Soviet. Relatively lowdown in its comedy and simple in its caricatures, the film aims at a base audience, to whom Ilyinsky's mugging may have played better. (Solntseva proves to be a reliable beauty; her acting career ended with marriage to Alexander Dovzhenko and an appearance in *Earth*, after which she went on to direct films for decades, often from Dovzhenko's screenplays.) An unassuming pie-slice of history, *Mosselprom* is pure universalist pulp, with lovely vistas of 1924 Moscow, all vast spaces and looming buildings and bustling traffic.

Disc: A beautiful restoration from the Cinémathèque de Toulouse, with an unobtrusive (but also unamusing) new score by Charlotte Castellat and David Lefebvre. (MA)

Colossal Youth

Pedro Costa; Portugal/France/Switzerland 2006; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region 2; Certificate 15; 149 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: short films ('Tarrafal', 'The Rabbit Hunters', 'O nosso homem'), 'Finding the Criminal', Pedro Costa interview, trailer, booklet

Film: It's no surprise that Jia Zhangke is a fan of Portuguese director Pedro Costa, as they both released eerily compelling films in 2006 (Jia's was *Still Life*) that fused fiction and documentary, each set in an actual place that no longer exists, demolished in the name of technological or social progress. But to what end? Costa's lost souls, immigrants from Cape Verde, wander around the off-puttingly brilliant white boxes intended to rehouse them while clinging obstinately to their memories of the dilapidated but characterful Fontainhas shantytown, sometimes presented in oblique flashback but



Colossal Youth Displays a mastery of the 1.33:1 frame, Costa's compositions emphasising his subjects' mental apartness from their environment

usually via lengthy monologues. These are sometimes delivered by the shambling sixtysomething greybeard Ventura (the film's nominal 'star'), but he's more often a sympathetic sounding board. No other current director displays such architectural mastery of the almost obsolete 4:3 frame as Costa does here, his compositions further emphasising his subjects' mental apartness from their environment. **Disc:** Encoded to the same PAL video standard as Costa's original DV footage, this new transfer is therefore a slight advance on Criterion's NTSC version. Substantial extras include two interviews with Costa (one running nearly two hours), a hefty booklet and the three complementary shorts that he made in *Colossal Youth*'s wake, each reworking largely the same footage but with subtle shifts of emphasis. They similarly blend fiction with authenticity – the latter threatening the deportation of one of Costa's collaborators was apparently genuine. (MB)

The Molly Dineen Collection: Volume 2 – The Ark

Molly Dineen; UK 1993; BFI/Region 2; Certificate 12; 240 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: interviews with Molly Dineen and also with Dineen and editor Edward Roberts, essay booklet

Films: All of Dineen's best work has been themed around institutions in decline, but this long, searching look at the revered London Zoo as it lurches through a year of financial (and philosophical) crisis in 1991 is her masterwork on the subject. As the camera lopes alongside zookeepers competing for savagely reduced posts, or loiters with the general director caged in his office and waiting to learn his fate, the various stories flow into and feed off one another with an enviable fluidity.

Because the four-hour format and Dineen's slow-burn storytelling let

the material breathe, the wholesale eviction of animals as the zoo slashes its collection has real pathos – as, for example, when an orangutan politely hands back the tranquilliser dart that has rendered her woozy, and a spooked and skittish elephant is tenderly handed over to new owners in a moving seven-minute sequence.

The tone overall is conversational yet oddly revealing, unlike today's confessional story-structured mode, and as the human factions square up for a vicious battle over the zoo's future, you marvel at how Dineen can access all areas, ratchet up the tension, but still remain remarkably even-handed in her treatment. With its adroit combination of the up-close-and-personal and the wider picture (debates about captive-breeding programmes and the marketing obsession with cutely fluffy mammals roil through each episode), the series shows a sustained integrity and intelligence that make one hope Dineen will be given a canvas this large at least once more.

Disc: The transfer retains the original slubby, slightly grainy look of Super 16 film, and the extras

French connection: 'Les Cousins'



give real insight into the construction of the series, with Dineen and her editor Edward Roberts showing how they carved it out from 110 hours of film. Alan Yentob muses fruitfully on Dineen's I-am-a-camera technique: "The thing about Molly is that she's both discreet and she's *there*." (KS)

Films by Xavier Dolan

J'ai tué ma mère

France 2009; Network/Region 2; Certificate 15; 96 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

Heartbeats

France 2010; Network/Region 2; Certificate 15; 97 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: interviews with Monia Chokri and Niels Schneider, trailer

Films: Former child actor Xavier Dolan has been attracting serious critical attention as a result of the two films he has directed, written and acted in. He co-stars with Anne Dorval in the first of these, *J'ai tué ma mère* (*I Killed My Mother*), playing Hubert, a 16-year-old living in Dolan's native Montreal who has a love-hate (but mostly hate) relationship with his divorced mother Chantale (Dorval). The story apparently has strong autobiographical overtones, but Dolan's approach is commendably even-handed, insisting that these two individuals are equally flawed.

Both the most and the least striking thing about this film is the casual approach it takes to the homosexuality of the director and his protagonist. Hubert's relationship with his lover Antonin is treated in a matter-of-fact way by everyone involved; indeed, Hubert's frequent arguments with his mother seem to be sparked by virtually everything – including the amount of time he takes to rent some DVDs – except his sexuality. Dolan uses meticulously composed long takes filmed by an unmoving camera to present a non-judgemental view of the violently emotional conflicts, frequently composing shots with the actors at the bottom of the frame, almost crushed by the space visible over their heads, to suggest that these characters are all victims of a milieu in which their options are markedly limited.

If *J'ai tué ma mère* is a gay 400 Blows (a poster for which can be seen on Antonin's bedroom wall), then *Les amours imaginaires* (*Imaginary Loves*, blandly retitled *Heartbeats* for its UK release), is a tentatively bisexual *Jules et Jim*.

Dolan again stars as a young gay man who, like his friend Marie (Monia

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Chokri), is in love with Nicolas, played by Niels Schneider, previously cast as a boarding-school acquaintance with whom Hubert has an affair in *J'ai tué ma mère* (Dorval also reappears in a memorable cameo as Nicolas's mother). Here, the Schneider character's sexuality is teasingly ambiguous, with both the homosexual male and the heterosexual female attempting to make his seductively flirtatious gestures of friendship conform to a coherent sexual pattern. Dolan's camerawork is far more restless than in his debut, conveying the difficulty of negotiating that thin line between gay and straight behaviour. Taken together, these two superficially very different but actually closely related films suggest that Dolan is a talent to watch.

Discs: The transfers are both fine. The only extras are two English-language interviews and a trailer on the *Heartbeats* disc. (BS)

Golden Sixties

Martin Sulík; Czech Republic/Slovakia 2009; První Verejnoprávní/Region 0; 1,484 minutes total; 16:9 anamorphic; Features: '25 from the Sixties' documentary, booklet

Films: Years in the making, this marvellous 26-part oral history of 1960s Czech and Slovak cinema is the perfect video companion to Peter

Hames's (equally essential) book *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, fleshing out the latter's context, synopses and criticism with personal reminiscences and hundreds of clips, many subtitled in English for the first time.

Each episode contains a single autobiographical interview covering the same themes: early life, discovery of the cinema, first industry experience, creative flowering and, in many cases, state-enforced career hiatus at the turn of the 1970s, where the interviews mostly stop (though Jirí Menzel and Stanislav Milota discuss their own post-1968 'normalisation' in some detail). Copious illustrations include stills and extracts from feature films, shorts, newsreels, on-set reports, early student projects and deleted and/or censored footage. Most episodes showcase directors (almost every key 1960s figure who's still alive) but there are also cinematographers, writers and even an actor. Interviewees were clearly encouraged to reminisce about working with now-deceased New Wave luminaries – actor Jan Kacer's episode, for instance, is as much about Evald Schorm and Frantisek Vlácil as it is about his own career.

The chronological treatment allows older contributors such as director-teacher Otakar Vávra (b. 1911) and writer-executive Albert Marencin



War bond: 'Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence'

(b. 1921) to set the historical scene, tracing Czech and Slovak cinema through the liberal 1930s, Nazi-occupied 1940s and Stalinist 1950s, and the ideological hoop-jumping that accompanied each shift – director Ladislav Helge describes how even children's films became propaganda vehicles in the 1950s. There's also a lot about the day-to-day filmmaking process, which at times is universally applicable and at others (the role of the dramaturge, liaison with potentially hostile communist overseers) distinctively Czech.

Most episodes cover fiction, but space is made for documentary (Karel Vachek, Drahomíra Vihanová) and animation (Jan Svankmajer). Slovak Film Institute co-funding and director Martin Sulík's nationality mean that Slovak filmmakers get less sidelined than usual – Ján Kadár, Elmar Klos and Stefan Uher are namechecked regularly, while primary interviewees include Dusan Hanák, Juraj Herz and Juraj Jakubisko. No overt editorial line is imposed upfront, but Sulík and his colleagues deserve credit for the lack of repetition: even when several people discuss the same film, such as the multi-authored *Pearls of the Deep* (1965), they generally pick differing aspects.

Most namechecks are local but foreigners occasionally surface: Lindsay Anderson observed Milos Forman at work and promptly poached his cameraman Miroslav Ondříček; Marencin persuaded Alain Robbe-Grillet to make two films in Slovakia; Hynek Bocan tried but failed to hire Zbigniew Cybulski. But if there's one consistent message that emerges from this multifaceted survey, it's that this New Wave was entirely homegrown, arising from very specific national circumstances and ending abruptly for the same reason: most episodes include footage (sometimes interviewee-shot) of the Soviet tanks of August 1968.

In 2010 Sulík's 205-minute follow-up, *25 from the Sixties*, traced the New Wave through 25 key titles, eulogised by multiple contributors. Some comments are recycled from *Golden Sixties*, but intercut with previously unseen material (Sulík conducted 84 interviews in total). While some films were self-selecting (*Closely Observed Trains*, *Daisies*, *Intimate Lighting*, *Marketa*

Lazarová et al), more surprising choices suggest that Sulík aimed as much to clarify the context as to extol individual works. Forman, for instance, is represented by his then-groundbreaking but comparatively minor debut *Audition* (1963), but his better-known Czech films are amply covered by his own episode.

Discs: Transfers are fine but the subtitles are the real bonus. The 26 episodes are either available separately – packaged in natty imitation film cans – or as a single 28-disc box (including *25 from the Sixties*) with a Czech-language booklet. For more information go to <http://www.zlatasedesata.cz/>. (MB)

Heavenly Creatures

Peter Jackson; New Zealand 1994; Peccadillo/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 99 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: 'Looking Back – Rosie Fletcher, Alan Jones and Kim Newman remember Heavenly Creatures'

Film: Peter Jackson directs this cautionary tale set in 1950s New Zealand (based on the true story of the notorious Parker-Hulme murder case) with tremendous verve. Energetic camerawork, eye-popping colour and quicksilver editing are complemented by the hypercharged performances of a youthful Kate Winslet and Melanie Lynskey as teenage friends Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker. (In other hands, you can easily imagine the same film being made as a dour, naturalistic costume drama.) The tone is set from the outset when Jackson moves from archive colour footage of sleepy middle-class Christchurch to shots of the two girls running through the streets with blood smeared on their faces. Hulme, who rebuilt her life after the murder as the detective novelist Anne Perry, claimed in an interview that she and Parker weren't lesbians; nonetheless, their relationship was intense and all-absorbing, and Jackson shows brilliantly how they created their own self-enclosed fantasy world – and lost their moral bearings as a result. He also makes us very aware just how brutal the crime they committed in the name of their friendship really was. **Disc:** The film has been remastered. The extras include a documentary looking back at the film's impact in the UK on its first release. (GM)



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The Last American Hero

Lamont Johnson; US 1973; Second Sight/Region 2; Certificate PG; 91 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Film: Loosely based on Tom Wolfe's high-revved 1965 *Esquire* profile of Nascar star Junior Johnson, this lean, race-crammed story follows a North Carolina moonshine-runner's move from dodging the police *Dukes of Hazzard*-style to hard-won racing-circuit success. Having stripped away Wolfe's exuberant analysis of the muscle-car craze in the New South, what's left is a hardscrabble story of pinewoods poverty, in which stock-car racing occupies the place that boxing did in Depression-era sports films. A certain dour naturalism is the film's saving grace, along with blinking, pared-back performances from Gary Busey's good-ol-boy brother and Valerie Perrine's amiably perfidious groupie. As Junior, Jeff Bridges mixes a stubborn, win-at-all-costs streak into the aw-shucks gaucheness he perfected in *The Last Picture Show* (1971), but his watchable diffidence is overshadowed by the film's obsession with rival-slaming, eat-my-dust Nascar antics. **Disc:** A passable transfer, slightly grainy, with an authentically subdued 1970s colour palette. No extras, for a release as stripped-down as a stock car. (KS)

Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence

Oshima Nagisa; UK 1983; Optimum/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 15; 118/123 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: 'The Oshima Gang', interviews, clip from 'Scenes by the Sea'

Film: Oshima Nagisa's first (partly) English-language work has attained the status of a modern classic. Adapted from Laurens van der Post's *The Seed and the Sower*, this film about tensions, both cultural and sexual, in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp has an eclectic cast that includes David Bowie and Tom Conti as British POWs, Sakamoto Ryūichi (who also composed the score) as camp commandant Captain Yonoi, and Kitano Takeshi (credited simply as 'Takeshi') as Sergeant Hara.

At the time, Kitano was primarily identified in Japan with the comedy duo The Two Beats, and so little known internationally that screenwriter Paul Mayersberg, interviewed for the *Monthly Film Bulletin* in May 1983, felt obliged to explain: "The actor who plays Hara, a wonderful actor, is a stand-up comedian in Tokyo. It's like going to see Eric Morecambe playing a straight part. There's a sort of cultural jolt there." With Kitano now established as a star (he worked with Oshima again in *Taboo*), the film plays quite differently for both Japanese and foreign audiences, making Hara seem much more central to its structure. The remarkable final scene, in which Hara delivers the eponymous line of dialogue, allows Kitano to show a softness and vulnerability that are central to Oshima's concern with undermining rigid definitions of gender and sexuality ➡

The English eye



Fanfare for the common man: 'Spare Time' (above) and Jennings at work (below)

Humphrey Jennings's earliest films reveal the beginnings of his uniquely poetic, patriotic style, writes Philip Kemp

The Complete Humphrey Jennings

Volume One: The First Days

Humphrey Jennings; UK 1934-40; BFI/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate E; 211 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: three alternative versions, Len Lye short film 'The Birth of the Robot', booklet

Lindsay Anderson famously described Humphrey Jennings as "the only real poet the British cinema has yet produced". True, that was over half a century ago, and other candidates have since emerged (Terence Davies, for one). But if anything Jennings's reputation now stands higher than ever, while those of his fellow British documentarists – John Grierson, Harry Watt, Pat Jackson – have faded. It may be, as Tomas Leach has suggested, that it has become difficult to look at Jennings straight, such is the aura of reverence that surrounds him. If so, the BFI's projected three-disc set – of which this is the first volume – could offer the ideal opportunity to re-evaluate his work.

The disc neatly covers all the films Jennings directed for the GPO Film Unit, before it was sucked into the government's wartime propaganda drive and re-emerged as the Crown Film Unit. (As such, it overlaps with the BFI's three-disc GPO Film Unit release.) These were unmistakably Jennings's prentice years, as he gradually fought free of the bonds of Griersonian didacticism, and some of the earliest items – 'Poste Haste', 'Locomotives', 'The Story of the Wheel' (all 1934) – with their boy's-own scale models and pompous voiceovers, may well appeal only to completists. Even

as late as 1940, Jennings could direct something as ploddingly instructional as 'Welfare of the Workers', described by his colleague Joe Mendoza as "so boring I fell asleep watching the rough cuts".

Even here, though, there's an inherent historical interest in the film, depicting as it does the initial birth-pangs of the Welfare State. The same goes for 'Penny Journey' (1938), tracking the delivery of a postcard from Manchester to a Sussex village in less than 17 hours (read it and weep, Royal Mail), and the countryside films 'The Farm' (1938) and 'Spring Offensive' (1940). Jennings was born and brought up in Suffolk, and his love of country ways shines through these films. The proudly introduced mechanical devices, such as a horse-drawn reaper-and-binder, now look charmingly old-fashioned. The alternative version of 'The Farm', 'English Harvest', features among the disc's extras; it's slightly shorter and mercifully free of the original's grindingly facetious commentary.

A few months after 'English Harvest' comes 'Spare Time' (1939) – the first unmistakably 'Jennings film'. The sense of freedom borders on the intoxicating. There's no attempt to instruct or exhort;

Jennings gradually fought free of the bonds of Griersonian didacticism



Laurie Lee's commentary keeps to a quiet minimum; and Jennings lets the images, and their dynamic juxtaposition, speak for themselves. Hard to credit that Basil Wright could have dismissed the film for a "patronising, sometimes almost sneering attitude towards the efforts of low-income groups". On the contrary, the pride of the participants – northern brass-band players, Welsh choir-members, etc – is palpable, and Jennings celebrates that pride.

The imminent war isn't mentioned in 'Spare Time' but with hindsight there's a protective feel about it, a sense of a culture potentially under threat. With the outbreak of war, Jennings came into his own. 'The First Days' (1939), co-directed with Harry Watt and Pat Jackson, shares with 'Spare Time' its celebration of ordinary lives while capturing the mood of apprehension that gripped Britain during the Phoney War. By contrast, there's a strange sense of relief about 'London Can Take It!' (1940), made (with Watt) during the darkest days of the Blitz, as if to say, "Ok, this is bad, but it's no longer the unknown. We can handle it."

US reporter Quentin Reynolds's stoical, understated commentary adds immensely to the power of 'London Can Take It!' – and inspired Hitchcock to the final scene of 'Foreign Correspondent' (the extras include the shorter home-market version, 'Britain Can Take It!'). Here, as throughout the disc, the remastering in both formats is crisp and clear; the occasional blip and scratch hardly detracts from what were after all working films, not meant as an aesthetic experience – though thanks to Jennings, they often contrived to be both.

The one item not directed by Jennings is 'The Birth of the Robot' (1936), a gloriously doolally puppet-animation commercial for Shell directed by Len Lye in zinging Gasparcolor, for which Jennings worked on the decor. Now there's a follow-up project for the BFI, once Jennings is done: 'The Complete Len Lye'...

Lickerish all-sorts

The films of Radley Metzger represent the ideal of intelligent and stylish 1960s erotica, argues Tim Lucas

The Lickerish Quartet

Radley Metzger; US/Italy 1970; Cult Epics/Region free Blu-ray; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1; Features: making-of featurette, wild track/post-synch dubbing comparisons, alternate 'cool' versions of love scenes, trailers

Since the time of their first arrival on home video in the 1990s, the films of Radley Metzger have been a source of particular frustration to collectors. The films themselves represent the collective ideal of intelligent, tasteful and stylish 1960s erotica; however, for the past 20 years, First Run Features' presentations on VHS and DVD (including two reissued DVD sets) have been culled from aged, analogue tape masters that did the films' elegance no favours and were made worse by lack of anamorphic enhancement. Now, in a happy turn of events, Cult Epics – itself a label once associated with less-than-impressive DVD transfers – has found the budget to undertake a proper HD remastering of Metzger's filmography, beginning with his signature works 'Camille 2000' (1969) and 'The Lickerish Quartet' (1970), and the bisexual 'Score' (1974), his first (tentative) foray into hardcore. The three films are available separately on DVD and Blu-ray, and collectively in a limited-edition Blu-ray set called 'Radley Metzger's Erotica Psychedelica', which includes a unique bonus soundtrack CD of music from all three films and a fully illustrated booklet by Nathaniel Thompson.

Seeing Metzger's films remastered in 1080p and in their newly integral form, with some content that could not be projected in certain locations when they were new, emphasises how strikingly contemporary they remain in tone, audacity and spirit. All three titles occupy a similarly stylised plane of fantasy, where the striking wardrobe and set designs of Enrico Sabbatini seem either naive or dated in ways consistent with today's sense of what remains fashionably retro. 'Camille 2000', a Continental op-art take on Alexandre Dumas's tragedy 'La Dame aux camélias' starring Danièle Gaubert, already carries my above-the-title endorsement on its cover ("A masterpiece of its kind, an erotic film invested with taste, sophistication and real emotion"); it appears for the first time here in a restored director's cut, lengthened by 15 minutes and accompanied by various outtakes, deleted scenes and a production documentary. 'Score' (1974), adored by some but comparatively shrill to my senses, was Metzger's only foray into hardcore erotica under his own



Undressed for dinner: Silvana Venturilli and Frank Wolff in 'The Lickerish Quartet'

name, and is presented uncut on disc for the first time, with a similar wealth of extras; an expurgated version is also available, which abbreviates the climactic coupling of Cal Culver and Gerald Grant.

Metzger's most intriguing and written-about feature, 'The Lickerish Quartet', makes a timely revival in light of recent interest in Monte Hellman's 'Road to Nowhere' and other navel-gazing cult films about cinephilia, reality and illusion, from 'Peeping Tom' (1960) to 'Videodrome' (1983). Frank Wolff (best remembered as the ill-fated landowner Bret McBain in Leone's 'Once upon a Time in the West') stars as an unnamed castle owner who is entertaining his wife (Erika Remberg) and teenage stepson (Paolo Turco) with a B&W stag film when the son's restlessness sends them all out to a travelling carnival. There, the jaded couple are exhilarated to recognise the dark-haired female cyclist (Silvana Venturilli) in a wall-of-death act as the uninhibited blonde who pleased men and women alike in their 16mm sex film. The aristocrats invite her back to their 700-year-old castle, intending to embarrass and perhaps share her, and she accepts – but things don't go as planned. With the watchful young woman in their presence, the content of the scratchy movie-within-the-movie magically changes, initially obscuring the face of her putative character and later replacing her with a different actress altogether. Her hosts gamely invite her to spend the night and, once

Seeing Metzger's films remastered in 1080p emphasises how contemporary they remain in tone, audacity and spirit

behind the closed door of her room, the visitor laughingly rips off her dark wig to reveal her blonde hair. As her stay continues through the next day, the lines dividing past and present, and fantasy and reality, gradually blur. (In one of the film's laugh-out-loud frissons, Venturilli responds to Wolff's insistent queries about whether she appeared in the stag movie by admitting that sometimes she's uncertain whether she rides a motorcycle!) She ends up having sexual encounters with each of the family members, each tryst bringing her partners closer to some deeply buried, primal truth about themselves.

This systematic excavation of Freudian truths, illustrated with a good deal of cubist/mosaical editing (including teasing flash-forwards into revelations of the past), is much in keeping with Italian cinema trends of the day, particularly in the 'giallo' films of Dario Argento but also in non-thriller features such as Mike Nichols's Italian-made 'Catch-22' and the aforementioned Leone western. The film's close attention to objects, such as a plastic 'drinking duck' knick-knack which, in time, subtly crosses the proscenium from the B&W 16mm reel to join the set dressings of the colour film we're watching, shows a certain debt to 'Last Year at Marienbad' and other writings of Alain Robbe-Grillet, whose wife Catherine co-wrote with him (as Jean de Berg) the novel upon which Metzger's later S&M film 'The Image' was based. But 'The Lickerish Quartet' is hardly the success it is because of its intertextual similarities to other relevant works; it manages to walk a tightrope between disclosing enough information to satisfy, while leaving the viewer in possession of still other mysteries to ponder. The film works as a potent, teasing metaphor for what each of us brings to the movies we see, and what we uniquely take away from them.

– a concern now clarified by the contrast between the taciturnity of Kitano's later performances and the emotion he displays here. It's less like seeing Eric Morecambe in a straight part, and more like seeing Clint Eastwood in a John Cassavetes film. **Disc:** The Blu-ray image is sharp and detailed, though some panning shots in the sequence where Yonoi orders the prisoners to be brought from the hospital are extremely blurry. (BS)

More

Barbet Schroeder; France/Spain 1969; BFI/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 18; 117 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: filmed interview with Barbet Schroeder, booklet, trailers, hearing-impaired subtitles

Film: Already established as a producer for Eric Rohmer, former critic Barbet Schroeder embarked on this cautionary tale of excess – his first directorial outing – armed with elements of autobiography. In his teenage years, he'd spent time in the pre-tourist environs of Ibiza, while a more recent girlfriend was an ex-junkie determined to turn him on to heroin. He resisted (he says) but always pondered what might have been had the Mediterranean sun influenced his choice – hence *More*, a hesitant piece of storytelling whose tyro reserve somehow makes it more endurable than most over-heady drugs-are-bad celluloid sagas. True, leading man Klaus Grünberg, playing a German mathematics graduate ready to venture into the flames of 1960s self-discovery, is clipped, boorish and somewhat hard to warm to, but it's understandable that Mimsy Farmer is the woman to lead him astray. Short-haired and gamely Sebergian, she's as hard to read as she's fascinating, and also possessed of convincing acting chops as the dream of sun, sea, sex and enlightenment begins to curdle. The Pink Floyd soundtrack, the band's first post-Syd Barrett offering, moves from pastoral charm to unnerving *musique concrète* undertow, matching the mood perfectly.

Hard to make great claims for the movie as a whole, since it's pretty evident from scene one where it's headed, it's fairly tepid as drama, and Schroeder at this stage is evidently much more confident with individual images than joined-up sequences. What can be said, however, is that future *Days of Heaven* cameraman Néstor Almendros's response to the changing Balearic light and rugged landscape is utterly mesmerising in itself.

Disc: A film that has probably spent much of its life as a stalwart late-night attraction via battered old prints looks newly minted in this transfer from the original 35mm interpositive – released for the first time in the UK without BBFC cuts for instructive drugs use – though you'll need the Blu-ray disc to capture the full subtlety of Almendros's exquisite contribution. A scrappily shot but informative interview with the 70-ish Schroeder, who shows us round the Ibiza villa location, completes the package. (TJ)

Nostalgia for the Light

Patricio Guzmán; Chile 2010; Icarus
Films/Region 1 NTSC; 90 minutes; Aspect
Ratio 1.85:1; Features: five Guzmán shorts

Film: Chile's self-appointed one-man Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Patricio Guzmán has devoted the past four decades to chronicling the short-lived Allende administration and the Pinochet dark ages that followed, long after his countrymen have wanted him to stop. Plenty of major documentary filmmakers have dedicated themselves to offering portraits of their homeland, but no one has done it as relentlessly and righteously as Guzmán, who as a comfortable middle-class Santiaguan was enchanted with Allende socialism and rocked by the 1973 Pinochet coup.

This new Guzmán film seems at first blush to detour in an odd new direction – towards astronomy and philosophy, landing in the Atacama Desert, the elevation and absolute dryness of which make it one of the globe's optimal observatory locations. Guzmán uses the stars' distance to ruminate on the nature of time – as in, everything, even light, even *this*, is in the past – but eventually he finds his sociopolitical mojo again, speculating about how time has treated the ghost-town-turned-concentration-camp of Chacabuco, its ex-prisoners, the dumped bones of disappeared Pinochet victims, and the tough, striking old women who still scour the desert plateau on foot in search of body parts.

It's all about memory and guilt, or the lack thereof, of course. In a contemplative mode that comes with age (he is now 70), Guzmán free-associates all over the place, montage-cutting from the lunar surface to giant close-ups of calcified bone, and the film's philosophical musings slowly funnel down, as we knew they would, to a silent wowl of rage and a desperate plea for remembrance. Often stark and ravishing, *Nostalgia for the Light* is most moving as a manifestation of the filmmaker's stubborn righteousness. Guzmán's life project has been an active siege upon the apparently pathological Chilean hunger for amnesia; in film after film, he howls alone in the wilderness of a national culture still unwilling to face the Pinochet era's cost in corpses and vanishings, and here he simply resumes the attack from a fresh and almost cosmic angle.

Disc: A lovely all-digital film



Nostalgia for the Light Guzmán free-associates all over the place, montage-cutting from the lunar surface to giant close-ups of calcified bone

and transfer, and the additional new Guzmán shorts – totalling more than another 80 minutes, and including *María Teresa & the Brown Dwarf* and *Astronomers from My Neighborhood* – are lovely, if gentler, tangential chapters of *Nostalgia*'s speculative journey. (MA)

Quatermass and the Pit

Roy Ward Baker; UK 1967; Studio Canal/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 12; 98 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: commentary with Nigel Kneale and Roy Ward Baker, interviews with Joe Dante, Mark Gatiss, Julian Glover, Marcus Hearn, Judith Kerr and Kim Newman, 'World of Hammer' TV episode, UK and US trailers, alternative US credits sequence

Film: Almost nine years after Nigel Kneale's original BBC series was aired, Hammer finally got round to the film version, which filters the three-hour original down to a taut 98 minutes. Not that the story lost any of its ambition in the process, for the discovery of an alien spaceship during excavation works at a London underground station thrillingly expands its thematic reach to suggest extraterrestrial involvement in human evolution as the origin of evil, concluding that mankind's fascist impulse to destroy those different from ourselves is a terrifyingly indelible genetic imprint. Coming before Kubrick's 2001 this is pretty startling stuff, and it's timeless too – we can forgive the relatively modest production values when the material itself is so arresting. If anything, the ideas are far bigger than the film's ability to dramatise

them, since the action highlights – when Andrew Keir's professor Quatermass and James Donald's quizzical archaeologist disturb the long-buried craft – are fairly low-key (and sometimes crude) by modern standards. That said, director Roy Ward Baker does a fine job of ensuring that the excellent performances – especially Barbara Shelley working wonders in the subsidiary role of the telepathically sensitive assistant – really register the story's emotional potency, and he doesn't let the pace drop for a second. There's something quintessentially British in the way the whole thing never lets limited resources get in the way of its creativity, and this gleaming reissue is just one more reminder of Kneale's national-treasure status.

Disc: Arthur Grant's pin-sharp cinematography looks so good on the new Blu-ray that it shows up the rather cardboard sets, but few could complain about this fine transfer. Nearly two hours of newly shot interviews bring useful contextualisation (the inestimable Kim Newman is on fine form), though the real gem is the Kneale and Ward Baker joint commentary, a survivor from the original laserdisc release and a truly valuable record of their collaboration given that they're both sadly no longer with us. (TJ)

The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond

Budd Boetticher; US 1960; Warner Archive/Region 1; 101 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

Film: "You see, I'm in your hands," explains subservient bombshell Alice (Karen Steele) to the bastard she loves, Jack 'Legs' Diamond (Ray Danton), who used their first date as an alibi for larceny and only remembers to look her up again when he finds himself conveniently near her apartment while

gut-shot and desperate. Women take care of Legs – and a shock cut from this scene shows how he takes care of them: Mob arm-candy Dixie (Dyan Cannon, in her screen debut), another of his business-only conquests, is slapped ragged by his enemies after they've found out that he's been pumping her, quite literally, for information.

The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond is the fictionalised case history of the New York bootlegger, famed for surviving scores of assassination attempts. Per Joseph Landon's script, Diamond was an ice-blooded gigolo. Danton gives him the erect, haughty bearing of a prize show dog. The performance is bluntly nasty – consider Legs wiping his lips of a frigid goodbye kiss, or gaily emptying the chamber of a sniper rifle between turkey-shooting rivals. Any human feelings Legs shows are reserved for his brother Eddie (an early big-screen appearance by Warren Oates), while women are merely movable objects for him to leverage, as needed, with sexual bullying. In the opening, we watch Legs manoeuvre Alice through a 'perfect' date with smiling subterfuge, then excuse himself from watching a movie with her and, unbeknown to her, rob a neighbouring jewellery store.

Legs Diamond takes place in a flimsy-looking, underpopulated, backlot New York City, but director Budd Boetticher shows invention amid the economy. One novel sequence has Legs taking the Grand Tour with Alice, now his wife and a souse, watching the repeal of Prohibition and the passing of his way of life in a series of multilingual newsreels as they move through European capitals. An on-the-nose coda makes the moral of Legs' life as stark as Lucien Ballard's bright, flat, grey-and-white cinematography: "He never loved anybody – that's why he's dead." **Disc:** No extras, but sound and image have been given a thorough power-washing. (NP)

The Soviet Influence from Turksib to Night Mail

Viktor Turin et al; USSR/UK 1929-36; BFI/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate U; 163 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: booklet

Films: Viktor Turin has become one of those directors remembered for a single movie: the 1929 Soviet documentary *Turksib*. Prior to that, according to Jay Leyda, he made "good-looking studio films" for the Ukrainian studio VUFKU; subsequently he directed one more work, *Men of Baku* (1938), described by Leyda as "a well-made imitation of [Grigori Kozintsev's] *Maxim* films". But just once he attained genius: dynamic, exhilarating and visually stunning, *Turksib* is one of the glories of the short-lived golden age of Soviet cinema.

The film recounts the construction, across desert and mountain, of the Turkestan-Siberian railway, designed to bring grain to Turkestan in return for its cotton crop. The unabashedly heroic tone comes as no surprise – the invading surveyors and commissars, welcomed with smiles by Turkestan tribesmen,

'Quatermass and the Pit'



NEW RELEASES

are hailed as "the advance guard of the new civilisation" – and nor does the triumphalist worship of technology: "Stubborn is Nature, but still more stubborn is man and the machine." Less expected, perhaps, is the sheer visual beauty of the photography: a caravan of camels casting elegant, elongated shadows across the sand dunes, the ballet of dancing tumbleweeds that heralds the approach of the simoon desert wind.

The aim of this BFI release, though, isn't just to restore *Turksib* to the canon, but also to trace creative connections between Soviet propaganda films and the pioneering British documentarists of the early 1930s. To that end, we're offered six short films: *The Workers' Topical News No 1* (1930), a newsreel put out by the Federation of Workers' Film Societies; *Australian Wine* (1931), a brief promotional film; Arthur Elton's *Shadow on the Mountains* (1931); Basil Wright's *The Country Comes to Town* (1933); Paul Rotha's *The Face of Britain* (1935); and *Night Mail* (1936), the classic that teamed W.H. Auden's verse with Benjamin Britten's score.

Turksib certainly impressed the British documentary school. Unusually, it was granted a UK showing not long after it was completed (in general, the British authorities were paranoid about Soviet propaganda), and John Grierson, father of the school, supplied the English intertitles. Any direct influence on the six films included here seems a little more tenuous. *The Worker's Topical News* is included since it featured on the bill at the British premiere of Turin's film, but otherwise what they have in common seems to be a matter of shooting figures from ground level so that they rear up heroically against the sky, and a starry-eyed faith in the utopian potential of technology. True, the harsh, rhythmic cutting in the 'Smoke Age' section of *The Face of Britain* hints at Russian influence, but channels Eisenstein or Pudovkin rather than Turin.

Shadow on the Mountains comes closest to *Turksib* in its visual qualities, evoking the austere beauty of the Black Mountains of South Wales. Elsewhere, a certain parochiality (especially in *The Country Comes to Town*, with its nannyish homilies and clipped voiceover) causes these films to fall short of their Soviet models.

Discs: Transfers show some sign of wear, though not enough to spoil our enjoyment, and Guy Bartell contributes a stirring score to *Turksib*. (PK)

Tagore Stories on Film

Hungry Stones/Three Daughters/Kabuliwala/The Home and the World/Four Chapters

Tapan Sinha/Satyajit Ray/Hemen Gupta/Satyajit Ray/Kumar Shahani; India 1960/61/61/84/97; National Film Development Corporation/Region 0 NTSC; 106/161/140/138/110 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: 'Natir Puja' short film, documentary, booklet

Films: A showcase release from India's National Film Development Corporation, this six-disc set marks the



Treasures 5 Clearly filmmakers of the first decades of the century were less committed to the myths of the West than they were once talkies arrived

150th anniversary of the birth of poet, writer, composer and artist Rabindranath Tagore with five feature-length adaptations, Satyajit Ray's centenary documentary, and the only film on which Tagore worked directly.

The UK DVDs of the two Ray titles have recently been reviewed in *S&S* (December 2009 and November 2010), though what we know as *Two Daughters* is presented here in its original three-story form, with 'The Postmaster' and 'Samapti' now bookending 'Monihara', a cautionary tale about a rich man's young wife whose seemingly idyllic existence is undermined by her inability to produce children and her increasingly obsessive fetishising of her jewels as a substitute for more meaningful pleasures. It's longer and more melodramatic than the other two stories (especially when it lurches into the supernatural), which may explain its removal from the international version, but it's good to have it restored.

Bengali cinema's other great Tagore interpreter was Tapan Sinha, represented here by the ghost story *Hungry Stones*, about a tax collector (Soumitra Chatterjee) who moves into a haunted mansion against the advice of friends and finds himself bewitched by a ghost who seems oddly but inexplicably familiar. Long stretches of the film are hypnotically wordless, as the camera prowls through cavernous rooms to reveal the building's long-buried memories coming to unsettlingly vivid life, making a stark contrast to the jovial office small talk during the day.

Sinha also adapted Tagore's *Kabuliwala* in 1957, but this box-set opts for the 1961 Hindi remake by Hemen Gupta. The most overtly 'Bollywood' film in the set, complete with a disconcerting segue from a scene of appalling personal tragedy to a children's musical number straight out of *The Singing, Ringing Tree*, it's given an

emotional anchor by Balraj Sahni's moving performance as the Afghan salesman (or 'Kabuliwala') who is forced to emigrate to India for financial reasons and becomes obsessed with a little girl who reminds him of his own abandoned daughter, an emotional detail that's inevitably ignored by suspicious locals.

Kumar Shahani's last feature *Four Chapters* is the most recent film, and the most overtly political (and experimental), visibly groping towards a cinematic language with which to express both Tagore's famous ambivalence towards the actions of the Indian nationalist movement (firmly supporting it in theory, he balked at its more violent excesses) and a more general denunciation of the evils of an ideological indoctrination that takes no account of personal circumstances – which comes to a head when two revolutionaries fall in love.

Ray's 1961 centenary documentary about Tagore (presented here in the English version, narrated by the director) and the short dance-drama *Natir Puja* (1932), the only film to which Tagore contributed directly, round out an admirably comprehensive set.

Discs: The transfers are variable (*Natir Puja* comes off worst, and was clearly lucky to survive at all) but are generally above average for Indian archive titles. The Ray films come across particularly well: *The Home and the World* is from the same source as Artificial Eye's disc, while the near-pristine *Three Daughters* would eclipse Mr Bongo's *Two Daughters* even if the latter had had the same title. Subtitles are electronic and optional in all cases apart from *Hungry Stones*, which is sourced from an English-subtitled print: with that film, occasional paucity is a bigger problem than legibility. The booklet, in English, offers notes on the film and a potted history of Tagore adaptations. (MB)

Treasures 5: The West, 1898-1938

US 1898-1938; 596 minutes; National Film Preservation Foundation/Region 0 NTSC; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: notes, commentaries, documentation, new scores

Films: There's no overstating the value and ardent beauty of the *Treasures* series of DVD releases, elaborately produced storehouses of cultural memories from America's National Film Preservation Foundation, a non-profit organisation supported by the Library of Congress, the body largely responsible for the nation's rejuvenated efforts at rescuing its cinematic heritage. That is, not Hollywood classics, which preserve themselves, but 'orphans' – historical shorts, newsreels, forgotten features, promotional films and so on, which would otherwise deteriorate into nitrate goo. Each edition has arrived as a rocket from the forgotten past, with a library's worth of annotation and historical context for each of the films, which vary from a few seconds long to feature-length.

This new box, tallying at a hair's breadth away from ten solid hours, comes thematically conceived, restricting itself to cinema about and shot in 'the West' – a sociopolitically troublesome term, and one that, in the set's selections and ample texts, is defined as mutable and subject to myth, real politics and bigotry. This is just a little less fun than the random melee of the first two *Treasures* sets, which jumped from Groucho Marx's home movies to Rose Hobart to a Rin Tin Tin epic, but it also makes the new set a trove for scholars and teachers, as well as obsessives devoted to the legend and reality of 'the West'.

The 40 individual inclusions range from scores of aboriginal western-frontier dramas, starting with 1910's *Over Silent Paths* (starring Marion Leonard, as merely one of the tough, resourceful heroines who proliferated in the early decades as they didn't later on) to the fabulous Victor Fleming-directed *Mantrap* (1926), in which a luscious Clara Bow flirts her way through the Canadian wilderness. The non-fiction elements include promos (for California peaches, Lake Tahoe, FDR's New Deal-era Civilian Conservation Corps etc), newsreels (the plight of California-restricted hobos during the Depression, how to make a horsehair lariat), home-movie travelogues, and so on.

The tactile pleasure of all this history-in-amber is its own reward, but it's also remarkable how integrated and gender-neutral early depictions of frontier life were; clearly, filmmakers and viewers of the first decades of the century were far less naive, and much less committed to the myths of the West (including the clichéd views of Native Americans), than they were once talkies had arrived. Here, the myth is used, but only as a self-mocking daydream. It shouldn't be very surprising – several of the independent films here were produced by lawmen and outlaws, and the proximity in time and location to the actual fact of Old West life is palpable.

Discs: Coming from seven restorative archives (six American, one in New



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Zealand), the films are in the best shape possible, and the phalanx of contextual material, in audio commentaries and a 110-page book by curator Scott Simmon, nearly threatens to overwhelm the films themselves. (MA)

Visions of Eight

Milos Forman/Ichikawa Kon/Mai Zetterling/John Schlesinger/Juri Ozerov/Claude Lelouch/Michael Pfleger/Arthur Penn; US/Germany/UK 1973; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC; 110 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

Film: One of the loveliest freeform ideas to find patronage and popularity in the New Wavey 1960s-70s was the omnibus film, a rarely cohesive but always tempting quasi-genre defined as a collection of exclusively commissioned short films. The aesthetics of the genre are questionable – never is the entirety of an omnibus very satisfying – but its smash-up ranginess of conflicting styles and potpourri perspectives make the movies irresistible. (Favourites of any connoisseur would include 1962's *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 1963's *RoGoPaG*, and 1969's *Love and Anger*, all of which feature the era's most promiscuous omnibus-er, Jean-Luc Godard.)

This famous if not beloved film, the result of producer David L. Wolper's machinations, refines the subgenre, asking eight international filmmakers to produce a portrait of a slice of the 1972 Munich Olympics. One first scans the list with a gimlet eye – Pfleger was merely a low-boiling German softcore populist (no German New Wavers were available), and Ozerov had made a splash only recently with a giant Soviet war film. In any case, those particular Olympics quickly became famous for more than sport, and only Schlesinger's section, on the marathon, explicitly addresses the terrorism and deaths – but via a Brit runner who chooses not to think about it all. The focus is still on the athletes, and despite the 'visionary' mandate, it's startling to see how uniform the visual choices are: superslo-mo, compressed images, close-ups of sinewy limbs, etc. Ichikawa's segment on sprinters is generally considered the standout, but I prefer Penn's chunk of pole vaulters, as they flail suspended upside-down in the air like Blakean souls, twisting away from the slim bar as if it were a high-tension wire.

The pieces, eloquent or not, remain ragtag in toto, and rarely attain the ambitions of the filmmakers to 'explore' things such as obsession and defeat. The 1972 Olympics were the bleakest since the games' post-war reboot, but except for the grey skies and the news shots of the burned-out helicopter, you'd never know it from Wolper's project.

Disc: A fine transfer. No extras. (MA)

This month's releases reviewed by Sergio Angelini, Michael Atkinson, Michael Brooke, Trevor Johnston, Philip Kemp, Geoffrey Macnab, Nick Pinkerton, Kate Stables and Brad Stevens

TELEVISION

The Good Soldier

Granada/ITV; UK 1981; Network DVD/Region 2; 106 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3; features: stills gallery

Programme: A post-Poldark Robin Ellis gets top billing as the American narrator in this TV-movie version of Ford Madox Ford's enthrallingly ambiguous story of romantic folly and marital infidelity, though it is the pre-Sherlock Holmes Jeremy Brett who steals the show as Captain Ashburnham, the eponymous sentimental philanderer and object of the "saddest story I have ever heard". Utilising a Chinese-box structure worthy of Nicolas Roeg, the novel's celebrated indirection and authorial unreliability are adapted with fidelity and intelligence by screenwriter Julian Mitchell, who sensibly makes Ashburnham's wife (a stunning Susan Fleetwood) less superficially villainous. Beautifully presented by director Kevin Billington and cinematographer Tony Pierce Roberts, in hindsight this looks like both a prototype and a Janus-faced critique of the cycle of nostalgia-infused heritage productions that flourished throughout the 1980s. **Disc:** This superbly stylish film finally makes its very welcome debut on UK home video in a barebones release which, barring some scratches and fading, competently replicates the sumptuous look of the original broadcast. (SA)

Macbeth

Thirteen/Illuminations/WNET/BBC; UK 2010; Illuminations/Region 2; 207 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 16:9 anamorphic; Features: audio commentary, interviews

Programme: A Siberian ill wind blows through this production, in which Patrick Stewart's Thane of Cawdor models his look on Lenin (peak cap) and Stalin (bushy moustache) as part of a generic 1950s Cold War Eastern Bloc totalitarian aesthetic. Expanded from the 2007 Chichester Festival production, where the action was largely restricted to a kitchen set, this film version was shot entirely in and around Welbeck Abbey, making particularly striking use of its maze of underground tunnels. There are many strong visual ideas transplanted from the original stage version, such as having the three witches appear as nurses, who here use the body of a dead soldier as their cauldron. Some ideas fall flat, such as the "Scorsese-style" single take (as described by director Rupert Goold in the audio commentary), which frankly is over almost before you notice. But there are many daring and exciting moments (the "By the pricking of my thumbs" scene rendered as a kind of rap certainly stands out) to make this experience dynamic enough to dispel any lingering aroma of greasepaint.

Kate Fleetwood makes for a flinty, angular Lady Macbeth and, some



The Good Soldier In hindsight it looks like both a prototype and a Janus-faced critique of 1980s nostalgia-infused heritage productions

30 years Stewart's junior, adds an unusual dynamic to their relationship. Her (offscreen) death slightly unbalances the narrative's momentum, which begins to drag well before the end of what, despite being the shortest of the tragedies, eventually clocks in at just over two and a half hours. However, in a spectral final flourish, Fleetwood and Stewart are reunited as we see the bloodied Mr and Mrs Macbeth going straight to hell. **Disc:** An impeccable anamorphic transfer is supported by an hour of interviews with Stewart, Fleetwood and Goold, with the latter also appearing on the audio commentary opposite producer and academic John Wyver. These extras reveal many fascinating details (Fleetwood, Mrs Goold in private life, developed her portrayal by studying Myra Hindley, Rosemary West and even Nigella Lawson), though the comments are frustratingly hard to listen to while watching the film, as the audio on this track is several seconds out of synch. (SA)

Philo Vance

Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana; Italy 1974; Rai Trade/Region 2; 312 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: stills gallery, booklet

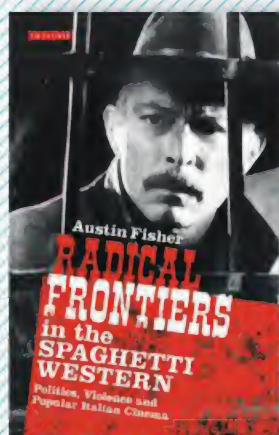
Programme: In the early 1970s, as the oil crisis continued and austerity reigned, television viewers were frequently whisked away to find fictional solace in the more stable and heterogeneous-seeming times of the pre-war gentleman detective. In the UK Ian Carmichael solved

crimes among the landed gentry as Lord Peter Wimsey; Georges Descrières had great fun as a loose approximation of Maurice Leblanc's gentleman thief Arsène Lupin across the Channel; and Jim Hutton broke the fourth wall weekly on the other side of the Atlantic when asking audiences to match wits with him in *Ellery Queen*.

In Italy during the Years of Lead there were several excursions into the genre, though none more playful perhaps than these adaptations of the first three S.S. Van Dine novels starring Giorgio Albertazzi as upper-class sleuth Philo Vance, once damningly described by Raymond Chandler as "probably the most asinine character in detective fiction".

Opulently shot on large soundstages in Turin, the series begins with Albertazzi addressing the audience, introducing the life and work of author Van Dine (a pseudonym for art critic and Nietzsche scholar Willard Huntington Wright), giving us a tour of the set and presenting some of the crew before finally getting in character. The effect is utterly disarming and makes for a charming valentine to the golden age of the mystery story as Vance investigates the 'Benson', 'Canary' and, best of all, the 'Greene' murder cases on the Upper East Side of 1920s New York. **Disc:** Shot on black-and-white tape, these episodes have been transferred in acceptable form though there are several instances of video dropout throughout. Aside from a stills gallery there are no extras, not even subtitles, making this a decidedly unfriendly release for non-Italian speakers. (SA)

Read

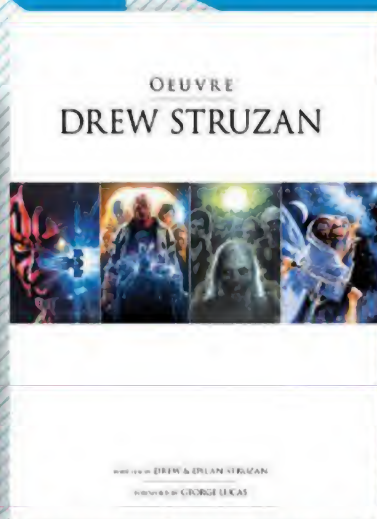


Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western: Politics, Violence and Popular Italian Cinema

By Austin Fisher, I.B. Tauris, 320pp, hardback, £59.50, ISBN 9781848855786

Ever more popular in the age of DVDs, eBay and online fandom, the spaghetti westerns of the 1960s have undergone a renaissance which has nevertheless left their intimate relationship to the troubled politics of 1960s Italy unexamined. *Radical Frontiers* reappraises the genre in relation to the revolutionary New Left and the events of 1968 to uncover the complexities of a cinematic milieu too often dismissed as formulaic. Austin Fisher looks in detail at the works of Damiano Damiani, Sergio Sollima, Sergio Corbucci, Giulio Questi and Giulio Petroni, examining how these directors reformatted the Hollywood western to yield new resonance for militant constituencies and radical groups.

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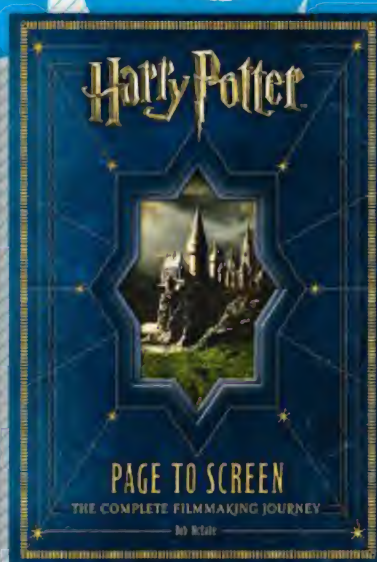
WITH A FOREWORD BY DREW & DYLAN STRUZAN
FOREWORD BY GEORGE LUCAS

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By Drew and Dylan Struzan, foreword by George Lucas, Titan Books, 214pp, illustrated, hardback, £29.99, ISBN 9780857685575

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Harry Potter: Page to Screen – The Complete Filmmaking Journey

By Bob McCabe, Titan Books, 540pp, illustrated, hardback, £49.99, ISBN 9780857687753

Packed with spellbinding details and hundreds of never-before-seen photographs and illustrations, *Harry Potter: Page to Screen* provides an insightful, in-depth look at the inner workings of the world of *Harry Potter*. The book unravels some of the films' most peculiar mysteries, such as how Harry's Invisibility Cloak became visible, which ingredients were used to make Polyjuice Potion a reality, and which mythical creature required the most make-up. Complete with profiles of the cast and crew, this is the official behind-the-scenes look at the art and making of the most popular film series in cinema history, as told by the Muggles who made the magic real.

www.titanbooks.com



Cinemas in Britain: A History of Cinema Architecture

By Richard Gray, Lund Humphries, 176pp, illustrated, hardback, £45, ISBN 9781848220720

Fully revised and including a gazetteer of surviving cinemas, *Cinemas in Britain* provides an architectural history of the cinema building in Britain, from its 19th century origins right up to the present day. As the popularity of filmgoing grew in the World War I period, there was a great surge of new building. Cinemas of the 1920s and 1930s could seat as many as 4000 people, and often featured fantasy interiors.

Recognition of the importance of the movie palaces of the halcyon days of cinema has led to around 120 cinemas in Britain receiving listed status, thus preserving them for future generations.

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BOOK OF THE MONTH



Revolutionary road: Wakamatsu Koji's 'Ecstasy of the Angels' offers a cocktail of violence, sex and militant politics

Manufacturing dissent

Alexander Jacoby *dips into an illuminating study of the Japanese avant garde*

Politics, Porn and Protest: Japanese Avant-Garde Cinema in the 1960s and 1970s

By Isolde Standish, Continuum, 216pp, £17.99, ISBN 0826439012

In the 1960s and 1970s, an avant-garde cinema emerged in Japan which, Isolde Standish claims, "contest[ed] the hegemonic 'official version' or definition of what essentially it is to be Japanese". The dominant post-war narrative of peace, reconstruction and economic growth was challenged by films that explored the legacy of wartime colonialism, defeat and occupation, examined themes of class conflict and prejudice, and questioned how fully post-war promises of democracy and freedom had been fulfilled.

There is a good deal of interesting material here, particularly as regards the theoretical concepts and influences that helped shape Japan's "counter-cinema". There are illuminating accounts of such key concepts as the "landscape theory" formulated by radical filmmaker Adachi Masao, which "equated state power with landscape", and was important not only to Adachi himself, but also to Oshima Nagisa. And Standish rightly points to the role – in an era dominated by US culture – of Italian neorealism and French philosophy in forming the style of Japan's New Wave. In this context, the decision to devote several pages to an analysis of a French film, 'Hiroshima mon amour' (1959), is surprisingly appropriate.

One may question Standish's overuse of academic jargon, as well as some aspects of her argument. For instance,

she writes approvingly that, in avant-garde films, "memory is exposed as a fallible human perceptual faculty", thus challenging the presentation of "autobiographical accounts of past events as empirical, and therefore, accredited historiography". While this is a fair interpretation of films such as Imamura Shohei's experimental documentaries, the political impact of other films is actually undermined by this argument. Standish follows conventional wisdom in describing 'Rashomon' (1950) as a fable about variable truths, which shows "the unreliability of memory as a testament to past events". But as Robin Wood suggests, 'Rashomon' is more plausibly interpreted as a film about people who lie to show themselves to their best advantage, and this interpretation is arguably more precisely relevant to early 1950s Japan, where men with questionable war records were being quietly restored to positions of influence.

Standish claims that she rejects a traditional auteurist approach, seeking instead to analyse "a shared generational consciousness brought about through shared experiences of the devastation of war, defeat and occupation". This is reasonable, but the acknowledgement that there are clear distinctions between the thematic emphases in films by Imamura as opposed to those by Yoshida Yoshishige and Oshima ultimately leads Standish back to a form of auteurism. Indeed, despite her scepticism about the idea of a canon, she primarily chooses texts by canonical filmmakers. She

It is gratifying the book devotes space to Yoshida, who is neglected in Britain

acknowledges that her choices have been dictated in part by availability (any scholar of Japanese film knows how difficult it can be to access certain major films). With that in mind, it is gratifying that Standish devotes space to Yoshida, who is still neglected in Britain, and also to Wakamatsu Koji. It is disappointing, nonetheless, to see no mention of a key avant-garde film such as Kuroki Kazuo's 'Silence Has No Wings' (1967), which dramatises many of the issues Standish explores, from the Hiroshima bombing to the fallibility of perception.

The book begins and ends in the 21st century, commenting on the last film of one of the post-war generation of directors, Fukasaku Kinji: his posthumously released 'Battle Royale II: Requiem', made as a response to the events of 9/11, and described by Standish as a "valorisation of 'terrorist' movements who oppose the globalising forces of world hegemony", and "a plea to Japanese 'youth' to carry on the struggles of idealism". She reads the standing ovation that greeted the film at its premiere as suggesting that these sentiments were endorsed by a middle-class Japanese audience.

But is this true? One does not have to be blind to the failings of US foreign policy to suggest that Japan did very well out of the post-war settlement, which brought it stability and prosperity unmatched in Asia. Standish is right to claim that the films of the Japanese avant garde represent an alternative to the official narrative, but it is worth observing that the official narrative was the one accepted by most Japanese, who for more than 50 years – in what, for most of that time, were the only free and fair elections in East Asia – repeatedly voted the pro-capitalist, pro-American Liberal Democratic Party into power.

FURTHER READING

Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television

By John Hill, BFI Palgrave Macmillan, 256pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781844572038

John Hill has been writing about Ken Loach and wider issues of post-war British and Irish cinema for so long (most recently in last month's *S&S*) that it comes as a surprise that this is his first book-length study of the director. Happily it was well worth the wait, matching its title's promise in that it not only offers a detailed critical study of virtually Loach's entire output from the now-lost BBC play *Catherine* (1964, reconstructed via its script and the contemporary reaction) to his most recent feature *Route Irish* (2010), but also explores the internal and external politics governing their production and reception, in often fascinating detail.

Although the book isn't a biography, and Hill's survey becomes less chronological as it progresses (the final chapter explores 1995's *Land and Freedom* and 2006's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, and their politicised treatment of history), he is nonetheless at pains to trace Loach's creative development, not least by exploring directions and techniques that he later abandoned, be they the Brechtian quasi-musical *The End of Arthur's Marriage* (1965) or the more general use of voiceover, initially a convenient means of rendering television drama less 'theatrical', but almost entirely abandoned by the late 1960s as being inimical to the kind of objective realism that we now recognise as characteristically 'Loachian'.

Since his unexpected career revival in the early 1990s, Loach has been widely regarded as one of Britain's leading big-screen auteurs (though he personally rejects the term), so the book's heavy concentration on his television work might initially seem surprising. But the vast majority of Loach's pre-1990 output was made for the small screen, and Hill repeatedly demonstrates that his feature films often have unmistakable roots in earlier television work. For instance the opening of *Land and Freedom*, in which the protagonist's effects are posthumously examined to reconstruct his earlier political activism, echoes the main theme of *After a Lifetime* (1971). Similarly *The Golden Vision* (1968) anticipates *Looking for Eric* (2009) in its combination of football and fantasy revolving around a particular celebrity (Alex Young and Eric Cantona, respectively), while *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* builds on material initially treated in the Irish section of his four-part 1975 TV serial *Days of Hope*.

The latter gets a chapter to itself, while Hill's analysis of the TV films *The Big Flame* (1969) and *The Rank and File* (1971) takes up almost as much space as his chapter discussing eight post-1990 features. Loach initially trained at the BBC, for which much of his 1964-77 output was produced, and the early part

Any Gun Can Play: The Essential Guide to Euro-Westerns

By Kevin Grant, FAB Press, 480pp, £24.99,
ISBN 9781903254615

When John Ford first heard the Italians were making westerns, his response was, "You're kidding!" Kevin Grant isn't kidding; he devotes nearly 500 pages to this strange phenomenon. But his title is something of a misnomer; his book is specifically a study of the Italian western. Grant is well aware that westerns have been produced in many European countries, and he nods towards (among others) those originating in the state-run DEFA studio in East Germany, the early silent westerns of Frenchman Joë Hamman, and even Godard's *Vent d'est*. But the extensive and useful filmography omits anything before 1955, or any films from Eastern Europe or Scandinavia.

This is defensible, since the several hundred Italian westerns of the 1960s and 1970s do form a relatively homogeneous group, both stylistically (desolate landscapes and highly dramatic, even idiosyncratic musical scores) and thematically. It's the themes that provide Grant with his basic taxonomic tools. Though he picks out a few auteurs (Leone, naturally, but also Sergio Sollima and Sergio Corbucci), he mainly deals with the films through their portrayal of the family, women, religion and politics, and in terms of the nature of the hero.

Some of his remarks are scarcely novel (the misogyny of many of the films has not escaped notice). But much

of what Grant has to say is both culturally well-informed and astute. There's an interesting section about revenge, for example, which Grant identifies as a major motivation in a great many of the films, but which functions differently from the way it does in Hollywood westerns. Grant traces the revenge theme back to its roots in European tragedy, from the Greeks to Jacobean theatre. But whereas in Hollywood revenge is typically seen as a destructive force that the hero renounces at the end (think of the Randolph Scott character in Budd Boetticher's *Ride Lonesome*), in the Italian western it's a much harsher and bleaker thing altogether. In Hollywood, revenge is subjected to ethical questioning (as for example in the protracted ordeal suffered by Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers*). In the Italian western, revenge as a motive goes largely unchallenged – a justifiable defence of family honour.

Grant has a good chapter on more overtly political westerns such as *A Bullet for the General* (1966), and Sollima's *The Big Gundown* (1966) and *Face to Face* (1967). The markedly more left-wing tenor of Italian westerns, as compared to the Hollywood variety, is attributed to the pervading anti-imperialism in European politics in the 1960s (in these films Mexico often stands in for the Third World), and to the significant number of Italian filmmakers with communist connections. Nor did Italian cinema come burdened with

Hollywood's historical legacy, in which westward expansion (and by implication capitalism) was seen in positive terms. Community in the Italian western is usually a dirty word, and 'civilisation' a thin veneer.

Italian westerns are rarely based on actual events or real people; instead they create a mythical world featuring not figures from history such as Wyatt Earp or General Custer, but the recurrent exploits of characters such as Django, Sabata and Trinity. The history that appears in the Hollywood western is, after all, not European history, and it's hardly surprising that Italian films should ignore it, while at the same time seizing on other aspects of the genre that appealed to both a European and a worldwide audience. The genre offered action and violence in plenty, while at the same time allowing filmmakers to give vent to attitudes such as anti-authoritarianism and anti-clericalism, which have a tradition in Italian culture.

Grant has clearly done a lot of research: he appears to have seen everything available, and has interviewed a lot of the participants. Lavishly illustrated, his book has both an extensive biographical dictionary and a full filmography (though the latter isn't easy to use; you first need to know the date the film was made, which isn't always readily available elsewhere in the book). It probably won't be the last word on the subject, but it's hard to know what else there is to say.

Edward Buscombe



Freedom of fiction: 'Cathy Come Home'

of the book doubles as a useful overview of British television history and how it was shaped by internal BBC politics. For instance, a memo from the BBC's head of talks (ie non-fiction), the redoubtable Grace Wyndham Goldie, strongly objected to the way that *Cathy Come Home* (1966) was seemingly able to evade the scrutiny applied to her own department's productions by virtue of its status as 'fiction' – despite its documentary elements.

Indeed Loach himself acknowledged in 1969 that *The Wednesday Play* and similar drama strands offered far more congenial platforms for the political messages that he, his long-term producer Tony Garnett and his various writers wanted to deliver – a point underscored by the fact that when he moved directly into television documentary in the early 1980s, he was subjected to the most severe censorship of his career. The BBC also offered continuity of a kind that he struggled to re-establish when making feature films, until he and regular producers Sally Hibbin and Rebecca O'Brien hit upon the present formula involving comparatively small contributions from numerous European funding sources – a formula that has enabled him to become almost as prolific as Michael Winterbottom.

Hill has uncovered so much material about Loach's often turbulent relationship with various production companies that it's a pity there's nothing about his equally fierce battle with the Save the Children Fund and London Weekend Television in 1971, which led to the film they'd jointly backed being written off in what was Loach's first direct experience of suppressive and politicised censorship. Similarly neglected is the 1977 diptych *The Price of Coal*, mentioned just once outside the comprehensive filmography and index; one assumes that Hill was stymied by its almost total unavailability (even for BFI research viewings) before its recent inclusion in the *Ken Loach at the BBC* DVD box-set (an essential companion to this book). But these are minor quibbles about what is clearly the most important addition to Loach scholarship since Graham Fuller's book-length 1998 interview *Loach on Loach*. Michael Brooke



Call to arms: 'A Bullet for the General'



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Classical oversight

Ian Christie repeats approvingly Mark Cousins's statement in his series *The Story of Film* that Hollywood films can't be regarded as classical, because they are romantic ('Out There in the Dark', *S&S*, October). But 19th-century European classical music is almost all romantic, yet we have no difficulty in describing it as classical. There is similarly no problem in designating American films of the classical period, and sometimes later, as romantic too.

John M. Smith
Hampshire

Digital defence

I don't think there is anything "dispiriting" about a greater diversity of films (and this is undeniably what digital offers) presented in optimum technical condition ('Digital or bust', Letters, *S&S*, October). There is nothing "imperfect" about a film presented in a digital format whatsoever, though there are of course differences in texture. Audiences are not captive at all. We have greater choice than ever before. Of course 35mm should be celebrated and never allowed to become fully extinct, but I do not think that the factors I pointed out in my letter (*S&S*, September) suggested this sentiment at all.

Jason Wood
Director of programming,
Curzon Cinemas

Missing link

Michael Brooke's review of the DVD release of *Schloss Vogelöd* refers to it as Murnau's "oldest surviving film" (*S&S*, October). Not quite. The rarely shown *Der Gang in der Nacht* (*Journey into the Night*), made the previous year, was rediscovered in an East German archive some years ago by the indefatigable Henri Langlois. Lotte Eisner gives a good account of it in her classic 1973 study of Murnau's films.

Even so, some seven or eight of Murnau's early films – including the



'Friends with Benefits'

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Hero or Villain?

I am disappointed that your reviewer Roger Clarke has seen fit to join the ranks of British critical denigrators in their reviews of the recently released Japanese film *Villain* (*S&S*, September). I found Sang-il Lee's film (pictured) utterly absorbing and truly moving – and not just because it's beautifully shot (though it is). Not being able to understand Japanese, it was difficult for me to judge the quality of the acting (which has been pronounced uneven), but the performances all seemed fine to me; and Fukatsu Eri as the dreamily deluded salesgirl Mitsuyo (is she so very deluded?) clearly possesses a commanding talent.

Mr Clarke's observation that "many of the characters in this film seem half dead" is true, but this "half deadness" actually lends conviction to the presentation of a digitally dominated internet society in which human contact is simultaneously widened and narrowed. Moreover, Mitsuyo's initially semi-torpid emotional state represents a very shrewdly observed rendering, by actress and director, of an alienated condition not uncommon in young people of all social periods. An effective dramatic exploration of this youthful anomie was timely.

Sang-il Lee's film has been compared (generally to its disadvantage) to other earlier lovers-on-the-run films – to



Ray's *They Live by Night*, Lang's *You Only Live Once* and Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*. My own view is that *Villain* would not be disgraced by a detailed comparison with any of these films. As a matter of fact, I would like to see it shown in tandem with *Thieves Like Us*, Robert Altman's fine 1973 remake of *They Live by Night*.

On another note, I have attentively followed Kim Newman's untangling of the web of references contained in *The Skin I Live In* (*S&S*, September), one of which is an allusion to the grave robbers Burke and Hare. The best of several film treatments of this story remains the 1945 Val Lewton production *The Body Snatcher*. Allusions to at least two other

Lewton productions may also be present in Almodóvar's film: *The Leopard Man* (1943) and *Cat People* (1942), both directed by the gifted Jacques Tourneur. In *The Skin I Live In*, Zeca, the homicidal brother of Dr Robert Ledgard, is wearing the carnival guise of a leopard when he breaks in on the captive Vera; so it may be noted that the leopard in Lewton's *The Leopard Man* has escaped from a carnival menagerie, while in *Cat People* the Magyar cat woman Irena is first seen painting – and arousing to a state of great agitation – a caged leopard in New York's Central Park Zoo.

John Owston
Southall, London

fascinating sounding *Der Januskopf*, his version of the Jekyll and Hyde story, starring Conrad Veidt – are still listed as lost. Let's hope...

Philip Kemp
By email

Great Scott

Charles Gant's piece on Kristin Scott Thomas's paradoxical bankability as a French-language star in the UK ('The Numbers', *S&S*, October) inspired me to check out one of the films he cited, Catherine Corsini's *Leaving* (*Partir*, 2009). Interestingly, it turns out to have an almost identical plot to another European *succès d'estime* made the same year, which also starred a bilingual British actress of a certain age – *I Am Love*. *Leaving* may not have the show-off style of Luca Guadagnino's film, which propelled it to festival success and a *Sight & Sound* cover, but it's a vastly more rewarding film, which actually bothers to engage the viewer in its protagonist's tragic *amour fou*.

Scott Thomas's French films may not cause a stir at the big festivals, but they continue to draw substantial arthouse audiences in the UK, which makes their complete absence from the features pages of your magazine all the more surprising. Or have you still not forgiven her for *Under the Cherry Moon*?

Tony Last
Hetton, Yorkshire

No credit

I love the Reviews section. It is the best part of the magazine, and your writers are top-drawer. Moreover (and I accept that I may be alone in this) I welcome the reduced credits. In fact I would not shed a tear if they were abolished altogether. I just can't see the point of them – all this print on paper!

Unlike some of your correspondents, my curiosity never stretches to wanting to know who the music advisor is, and if it ever did I'm sure I could find the information in a much quicker and more environmentally friendly fashion with this modern invention known as the internet.

Oliver Brown
Long Ditton, Surrey

Pun intended

In the October issue we were presented with not one but two pun headlines, one after the other. First was 'Eyre Conditioning' for the new *Jane Eyre* adaptation, then on the following page 'Stealer's Wheels' for Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive*. I do not expect such wit from a serious magazine. Keep it up!

Charles Jordan
By email

Translation required

I think I could follow the points that Kate Stables was making in her review of *Friends with Benefits* (*S&S*, October)

but probably could have understood the substance even better without a number of the words used, including: "booty-call", "dippy-hippie", "slampiece", "flashmob" and "deeley-boppers". (I was also unsure of "O tempora, o mores", but as that smacked of culture thought it best to check it out.)

Could these words be in some way related?

Dr Paul Quinn
By email

Frankenstein lives on

Your review of *The Skin I Live In* (*S&S*, September) detects echoes of "Mary Shelley's – though not James Whale's – *Frankenstein*". Surely Banderas's appearance (though thankfully not his acting) presents a passing resemblance to Colin Clive as Victor Frankenstein that is more than coincidence?

Paul Colbeck
London

Additions & corrections

October p. 79 *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*: United Kingdom/France/Germany 2011, (c) Karla Films Ltd, Paradis Films S.A.R.L. and Kinowelt Filmproduktion GmbH. Dolby Digital/Datasat Digital Sound. Aspect ratio [2.35:1], p. 81 *Turnout*: Certificate 18, 97m 21s, 8,761 ft +8 frames

September p. 79 *Sarah's Key*: The opening line of the final paragraph of the synopsis should have read: "In 2004, Julia and William meet in New York" – not Sarah and William, which was incorrect.

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